

## Children's health program freezes enrollment

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Enrollment in a program providing low-cost health insurance to thousands of Humboldt County children has been frozen as a result of the state's continuing budget crisis.

Beginning this week, eligible applicants to the Healthy Families program -- which provides affordable medical, dental, vision and behavioral health coverage to the children of working parents -- will be placed on a waiting list.

The program was designed for families with employed parents who cannot afford adequate health care for their children. Eligible families earn less than 250 percent of the federal poverty level, or approximately \$4,500 gross monthly income for a family of four.

In Humboldt County, 3,600 children ages 1 through 19 are currently enrolled in HFP. Due to the state budget problems, that number is unlikely to rise.

Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services Director Phillip Crandall informed the Board of Supervisors of the enrollment freeze this week, noting that children and families have been early casualties of the state's budget proposals.

"We should not hang the burden of California's budget on the shoulders of working parents and their children," Crandall said. "It's unethical, it's fiscally short-sighted. And it endangers the health and safety of our children."

The HFP is California's version of the federal State Children's Insurance Program, or SCHIP, which covers 65 percent of the costs associated with insuring more than 900,000 children statewide. Federal support was reauthorized and expanded in February. Today's enrollment cap will likely result in the forfeiture if some of these additional funds.

"The good news is that children who are already enrolled in the Healthy Families can continue to use their health care insurance," said Susan Buckley, director of the Department of Health and Human Services' Public Health Branch.

She cautioned parents with enrolled children to do everything necessary to stay enrolled, including paying monthly premiums on time and completing annual eligibility review paperwork correctly and in a timely manner.

Families apply locally for HFP through Healthy Kids Humboldt, which will focus now on helping families maintain enrollment, while continuing to assist new applicants so that eligible children can get a spot on the waiting list.

For more information, visit [www.healthyfamilies.ca.gov](http://www.healthyfamilies.ca.gov). For information about Healthy Kids Humboldt or help with HFP paperwork, visit [www.healthykidshumboldt.org](http://www.healthykidshumboldt.org). You can also call 442-6066.