

## Kids' insurance pays off

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A study released Monday proves what Solano County has known for ages: Spending money on children's health insurance actually saves money in the long run.

After six years of research, the Center for Community Health Studies at the University of Southern California released the data showing that Healthy Kids, a locally funded health insurance program for children, saves California and the federal government up to \$7.3 million a year in health care costs.

In fact, the research, which looked at Healthy Kids programs in nine counties, found instances where insurance prevented more than 1,000 unnecessary child hospitalizations per year.

Other findings include:

- Insurance increases low-income children's access to primary care, decreasing their chances of hospitalization for preventable illnesses and manageable conditions.
- The average cost of a child hospitalization is \$7,000
- State and federal government could save up to \$30 million annually in health care costs if Healthy Kids were expanded to all California counties.

The program is clearly an unqualified success. So why is it in danger of disappearing altogether?

President Bush vetoed a bipartisan proposal to reauthorize funding for the State Children's Health Insurance Program - or SCHIP - not once but twice in 2007. He said he wanted to see more money put toward it, but his actions could well have the opposite effect unless Congress can muster a plan to override the veto.

A hearing by the Senate Health Committee is scheduled Wednesday. Members should take note of this latest study.

Keep in mind that the program provides insurance to approximately 7 million people in the United States, including more than 1 million Californians.

According to a report released last September by the California HealthCare Foundation, SCHIP funding in California covered 832,000 children through the Healthy Families program, another 242,000 in Medi-Cal-related programs, and about 8,400 pregnant women in Access for Infants and Mothers.

Solano County is proud to report 97 percent of all its children are insured, thanks to efforts by the Solano Kids Insurance Program (SKIP), a program of the Solano Coalition for Better Health in partnership with schools, community organizations and health care providers. Still, SKIP staff has set its goal at 100 percent.

But if SCHIP goes away, it will affect thousands of Solano County children, not to mention millions across the country.

That must not happen. Lawmakers must use this latest report, armloads of statistics and their own common sense to develop a plan to keep SCHIP afloat.