

'A victory for children'

Obama extends health coverage for local kids

By NATALIE HOFFMAN
Register Staff Writer

President Barack Obama recently made health insurance coverage more accessible for thousands of underserved Napa County children.

Obama signed the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act, legislation that endorses the use of federal money toward subsidized health insurance programs for children.

It authorizes the renewal of health coverage for 7 million children across the country and extends coverage to 4 million more. It will be paid for with a raise in the federal tax on tobacco products — expected to generate about \$31.3 billion over the next four years, according to the Associated Press.

“By signing this bipartisan bill into law, almost 700,000 uninsured children in California and 4 million uninsured children across the country will now have access to health care,” Rep. Mike Thompson, D-St. Helena, said in a statement. “Our children deserve a healthy start and this legislation gives kids that chance.”

Mark Diel, executive director of Children's Health Initiative of Napa County, said it is “too early to tell” how much of the money will become available locally through his agency, adding that the additional federal dollars will free up money allocated to CHI from the state to further carry on the agency's mission.

“Today is a victory for children, not only in Napa County, but throughout the nation. The expansion of (the State Children's Health Insurance Program) is a great booster shot towards broader health-care reform,” Diel said.

About 4,000 Napa County children are enrolled in Healthy Families, he said, one of several subsidized programs available to needy local children through CHI. The agency also links children with Kaiser Child's Health Plan, Healthy Kids and Medi-Cal, mostly through outreach programs at local schools.

About 37 percent of Napa County children are enrolled in some form of subsidized health insurance,

Diel added.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger advocated using federal money to support SCHIP during Bush's presidency, according to a statement from his office.

"During an extremely difficult time for many California families, it's more critical than ever to continue a successful program that keeps hundreds of thousands of California's children healthy. ... This is the first of many steps that are urgently needed to fix our broken health-care system so that it is more affordable and accessible for everyone," Schwarzenegger said in a statement.

Thompson said the legislation reauthorizes the State Children's Health Insurance Program through 2013.

Napa Valley Register Copyright © 2009