



**For Immediate Release
September 11, 2008**

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New Study of Children's Health Initiatives Show Dramatic Gains in Children's Dental Health Care

Evaluations of Children in Three Diverse Counties Show Increased Access and Use of Dental Care

Los Angeles, Calif. – The ratio of children receiving dental treatments in the past six months nearly tripled with Healthy Kids coverage.

This is one of the dramatic findings from new data released this week showing that Healthy Kids, a locally-funded health insurance program for children, produced consistent and dramatic gains in children's access to and use of dental health care. The impact of the Healthy Kids program on children includes increased utilization of preventive dental services and sharp gains in the treatment of dental problems that potentially cause significant, harmful effects on children's health and school performance if left untreated. Among the findings, the proportion of children who received a dental treatment in the past six months nearly *tripled* with Healthy Kids coverage.

The on-going study, conducted by the Mathematica Policy Institute, the Urban Institute, the University of California, San Francisco and Johns Hopkins University, compiled data from evaluations of Healthy Kids programs in Los Angeles and San Mateo Counties and compared the results with previously released findings from Santa Clara County's program. The issue brief reporting the new findings was funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

"The results of this study are dramatic. The significant gains in both access to and use of dental care among kids enrolled in Healthy Kids program demonstrates the large impact that providing health insurance coverage to kids can have on children's health," said Chris Trenholm, Associate Director of Research at Mathematica Policy Research.

Prior to enrolling in Healthy Kids, few of these children had coverage for dental services, placing them at long-term risk for poor oral health and limiting their use of key services as routine dental check-ups and treatment. Dental disease is highly prevalent in California – 54 percent of kindergartners and 71 percent of third graders have a history of tooth decay, and 28 percent of children in both grades have untreated tooth decay.

The following is a summary of the main findings of the report on children's dental health care:

Access to Dental Care Improves:

- In Los Angeles County, the proportion of children with a usual source of dental care increased from 42 to 74 percent.
- In San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, the proportion of children with a usual source of dental care more than doubled, reaching over 80 percent as a result of the coverage.

- The proportion of children with a dental visit in the past six months dramatically improved in both counties where this indicator was measured (San Mateo and Santa Clara); from 25 percent to 60 percent.
- The proportion of children who received a dental treatment in the past six months nearly tripled with Healthy Kids coverage – from about 15 to 45 percent in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

“Given that dental disease is the most common chronic childhood disease, dental coverage is a powerful tool for relieving immediate suffering and improving children’s health and well-being,” said Jacque McLaughlin, Co-Chair for California’s Children’s Health Initiatives, which counts the CHIs in Los Angeles, San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties among its membership.

Los Angeles, San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties are part of the California Children’s Health Initiatives, a collaboration of 30 counties working to expand access to affordable health insurance to all children in California. Collectively, the Healthy Kids programs provide medical, dental and vision care coverage to more than 80,000 kids in California, and help enroll thousands of others into state-funded programs such as Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. Moreover, children enrolled in Healthy Kids are ones who would otherwise lack access to state-funded programs due to income or immigration status.

This latest evaluation, along with multiple studies of the Healthy Kids program released in recent years, overwhelmingly proves the value and impact of providing children with health insurance. Children enrolled in the Healthy Kids program have benefitted from an increased access and use of medical and dental care, a reduction in the number of school days missed due to illness and a decrease in the number of hospitalizations for conditions that could be treated and prevented through primary care visits.

“These results prove that small investments in children’s dental health coverage can lead to dramatic gains in access to and use of dental care, which is a crucial part of children’s overall well-being and health,” said Dr. Gene Lewit of the Packard Foundation. “Santa Clara, San Mateo and Los Angeles Counties have built a remarkable model for how kids can be covered and transformed how California and the nation think about covering all kids.”

About the California Children’s Health Initiatives (CCHI):

The California Children’s Health Initiatives (CCHI) is a collaboration of local Children’s Health Initiatives (CHIs) in 30 counties dedicated to ensuring that all California children have access to quality health coverage. Together, the CHIs emphasize streamlined enrollment into Healthy Families, Medi-Cal and Healthy Kids insurance programs, and share a goal of creating and maintaining a sustainable health care program for all children in California.