

## Opinion: A doctor's view: Cutting health care for California children is unacceptable

By Heidi Roman  
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As a pediatrician caring for children at a county clinic in San Jose, I am appalled by the proposed elimination of the Healthy Families program by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The reduction or elimination of this critical and successful state program would shirk our obligation to care for our state's children and would threaten their chance at a healthy, productive future. The proposed cuts are also fiscally irresponsible, as the state would lose all federal matching funds currently supporting Healthy Families.

Healthy Families is a low-cost insurance program that provides health, dental and vision coverage to children who do not have insurance and do not qualify for no-cost Medi-Cal. The loss of this program would affect nearly 1 million of California's children. This is the worst possible time to eliminate safety-net programs for children. The families affected are working families. Their children include many of the estimated 300,000 children who have lost employer-based coverage due to the recession in the last year alone, according to the University of California-Berkeley Labor Center. If Healthy Families is eliminated, these children would join the nearly 700,000 children in California who are already without health insurance.

I would no longer be able to see these children and give good preventive care and counseling to families. I will not see the 3-year-old already suffering from obesity who, if seen early and counseled, can be prevented from developing elevated cholesterol, diabetes mellitus and related problems that will otherwise extend into adulthood. The child with early signs of autism will fall through the cracks.

I understand that California legislators face an exceptionally complex and difficult task in balancing the budget. Yet elimination of Healthy Families is not only morally reprehensible, it is fiscally irresponsible. The state currently receives 2-to-1 matching funds from the federal government to administer Healthy Families. This money would be lost. In addition, we know that lack of health insurance leads to poorer health and increased future reliance on the state in the long term.

We all must make sacrifices for our state to become more solvent. But that is not what I see in the proposed elimination of Healthy Families and cuts to other safety-net programs. I see our children being asked to bear a disproportionate burden. These are the very children that we and the state will depend on in future years.

Instead of oppressive cuts, I urge the state to look at innovative ways to promote savings, streamline programs and emphasize cost-saving preventive health care. We have examples of such innovations on the local level, including the Healthy Kids program here in Santa Clara County.

The state must join, as a productive voice, the emerging national conversation regarding health care reform. And it is time for all of us to speak up for children, who do not have a voice in this debate. Please contact the governor and legislators and urge them to reconsider these proposed cuts. We must stand up and oppose the elimination of Healthy Families and other safety-net programs for children. It is a simply unacceptable option.

*HEIDI ROMAN is a pediatrician at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center. She wrote this article for the Mercury News.*