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West Virginia Is Recognized for Commitment to Children's Health Programs

West Virginia was recognized for its strong commitment to children's health coverage despite a tough economic climate, according to a report released today by the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families (CCF). Twenty-three states, including West Virginia, expanded eligibility for their Medicaid or CHIP programs or made it easier for uninsured children to enroll and stay enrolled in the programs.

CCF is an independent, nonpartisan policy and research center whose mission is to expand and improve health coverage for America's children and families. The full report, "Weathering the Storm: States Moving Forward Despite Tough Economic Times," is available at <http://ccf.georgetown.edu>.

In 2009, West Virginia increased eligibility for CHIP coverage to uninsured families earning up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level, or about \$46,000 for a family of three. The state has also continued to put resources into outreach to find and enroll eligible children in CHIP and Medicaid. About 750 more children have health coverage thanks to the expansion.

"West Virginia has made impressive progress in expanding coverage to uninsured children," said Renate Pore, health policy analyst at the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. "From state policymakers to local outreach workers, people have worked hard to assure that our children have access to the care they need."

According to new Census data released this month, 24,000 children remain uninsured in the Mountain State. When Congress reauthorized the State Children's Health Insurance Program in February, it provided increased funding and more flexibility to states to insure additional children. West Virginia's allotment jumped by 73 percent, from \$25 million to more than \$43 million.

Three state groups – the Center on Budget and Policy, the Healthy Kids and Families Coalition, and West Virginians for Affordable Health Care – have outlined steps that West Virginia can take to maximize CHIP. These including raising the family income limit and reducing waiting periods. Their paper, “Almost There: Covering All Uninsured Children in West Virginia by Improving CHIP,” is available at www.wvpolicy.org.

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The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy is a policy research organization that is nonpartisan, nonprofit, and statewide. It focuses on how policy decisions affect all West Virginians, especially low- and moderate-income families.