

October 13, 2009

Tennessee caps CoverKids enrollment

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tennessee's health insurance program for children will stop accepting new enrollment at the end of next month because of budget constraints.

None of the nearly 42,000 children currently enrolled in CoverKids will be affected by the cap as long as they continue to meet eligibility requirements.

The state pays for a quarter of the CoverKids program, or about \$29 million.

The federal government matches that with about \$87 million.

A family of four earning about \$55,000 a year or less can qualify for the program with no monthly premiums.

At the launch of Cover-Kids in 2007, Gov. Phil Bredesen estimated that there were about 127,000 children in Tennessee without health insurance.

He set a goal to cover 40,000 children by the 2008-2009 budget year.

The program has now met that goal despite a lackluster start.

Last year the state sent out 1.5 million flyers about the program to public school students to inform parents about its existence.

No more funds available

Bob Duncan, director of the Governor's Office of Children's Care Coordination, said the program can't expand much further than its current level because the economic downturn has prevented additional funding.

"When we opened CoverKids in 2007, we said we would always operate within our financial means and manage enrollment accordingly," Duncan said in a release. "We've come to a point where our budget fully supports current membership, which requires us to suspend the application process."

CoverKids is Tennessee's version of the federal State Children's Health Insurance Program — known as SCHIP — for families who make too much money to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford private health insurance.
