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Contacts: Marjorie Tharp, AAP, 202-724-3303
Joe Luchok, MOD, 202-261-7582

Jennifer Combs, CCF, 202-687-0331
Gillian Ray, N.A.C.H., 703-797-6027

***LEADING CHILD HEALTH GROUPS PRESENT KEY PRIORITIES
FOR SCHIP REAUTHORIZATION***

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Leading child health organizations --- the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), March of Dimes, and the National Association of Children's Hospitals --- joined the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families today to release a report that identifies key issues that must be addressed in reauthorizing the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). They also called on federal policymakers to make SCHIP reauthorization a top 2007 priority in the 110th Congress.

“SCHIP has achieved remarkable progress, and we want to strengthen it for the future,” said AAP President Jay E. Berkelhamer, M.D., FAAP. “To date, it has resulted in more children having a usual source of care, receiving preventive care and immunizations, and reducing unmet need for dental care.”

SCHIP now covers more than 6 million children a year, according to the report, *Too Close to Turn Back: Covering America's Children*. The report presents data showing that SCHIP and its larger companion program Medicaid have driven down the uninsured rate among low-income children by one third.

According to the groups, the key measures of success for SCHIP reauthorization are:

- Providing needed SCHIP funding,
- Protecting and strengthening Medicaid,
- Eliminating enrollment barriers, and
- Promoting quality initiatives.

The report calls on Congress to ensure that SCHIP has funding needed to cover more children, eliminate red-tape barriers to child health coverage, and address quality and accountability of child health coverage.

“In the nearly 10 years since enactment of SCHIP, the world of quality and performance measures in health care has opened up dramatically,” said Lawrence A. McAndrews, president and chief executive officer of N.A.C.H. “However, there's been little federal investment in

quality and performance measures for children's health care. It's time to do that for kids, through both SCHIP and Medicaid."

American voters say more needs to be done to expand and secure children's health care coverage. Eighty-two percent of voters said they want Congress to add new funds to SCHIP and two-thirds of these voters want Congress to provide enough funding to allow states to enroll more children in SCHIP, according to an election-eve survey conducted by Lake Research Associates for the Center for Children and Families.

Recognizing that SCHIP stands on the shoulders of Medicaid, the groups identify keeping Medicaid strong as a key priority for SCHIP reauthorization.

"Together, working in partnership, SCHIP and Medicaid have been resoundingly successful in lowering the uninsured rate among children despite rising health care costs and job market dynamics that have pushed up the number of uninsured adults," said Cindy Mann, executive director of the Center for Children and Families.

Congress must also eliminate barriers that prevent eligible children from getting coverage. New approaches, such as, offering performance-based assistance with coverage costs to states successful in covering uninsured children, can help keep the nation moving in the right direction.

"According to the Current Population Survey, 49 percent of all uninsured children are eligible for Medicaid and 19 percent are eligible for SCHIP. States must be given the tools and resources needed to enroll all eligible children in both programs," said Dr. Jennifer L. Howse, president of the March of Dimes.

Since its inception in 1997, SCHIP has been the most successful health care reform Congress has undertaken in the last 10 years and the program has enjoyed a strong bipartisan support among congressional lawmakers, the nation's governors as well as voters. The incoming 110th Congress is slated to reauthorize the SCHIP law, which is scheduled to expire Sept. 30, 2007.

The Center for Children and Families' policy report, *Too Close to Turn Back: Covering America's Children*, is available on the Web at <http://ccf.georgetown.edu>

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The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.

The Center for Children and Families (CCF) is an independent, nonpartisan policy center based at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute whose mission is to expand and improve health coverage for America's children and families.

The March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency whose mission is to improve the health of children by preventing birth defects and infant mortality. Founded in 1938, the March of Dimes funds programs of research, community services, education, and advocacy.

Representing 130 children's hospitals, the National Association of Children's Hospitals addresses public policy issues affecting children's hospitals' missions of service to the children of their communities, including clinical care, education, research and advocacy.