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Survey cites Kansas for HealthWave expansion

KHI NEWS SERVICE

July 29, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Kansas is one of at least 18 states that have expanded health insurance programs for children this year, according to a recent survey by Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute.

"This is a difficult time for state budgets but an even harder time for family budgets, and many states are responding to meet the need," said Jocelyn Guyer, co-director of the institute's Center for Children and Families.

Earlier this year, lawmakers agreed to expand the state's HealthWave program to include children in households at 250 percent of the federal poverty level, about \$ \$3,815 a month for a mother and two children.

The expansion takes effect Jan. 1.

Currently, HealthWave eligibility is capped at 200 percent of the poverty level.

The expansion is expected to add about 4,600 children to the HealthWave rolls in 2010 and about 9,000 by 2012.

The survey found that Kansas was one of 10 states that expanded children's health insurance eligibility in 2009. The other nine states: Alabama, Washington, North Dakota, Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska, Arkansas, West Virginia, and Montana.

Eight states took steps to simplify their programs' enrollment processes in order to include more children. They were: Alaska, Florida, Louisiana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin.

Oregon and Ohio proposed — but have yet to fund — eligibility expansions.

Currently, [eligibility in 22 states](#) — not including Kansas — is at or above 250 percent of poverty.

After Jan. 1, Kansas will be one of 30 states covering children in households at or above the 250-percent threshold.

Already, 15 states cover children up to 300 percent of poverty.

"It is critical that states keep working to strengthen and maintain the gains they've made in offering affordable health coverage options to uninsured children and that the federal government remains a strong partner in their efforts," Guyer said.

California, she said, recently froze enrollment in its children's health insurance program in an effort to cut spending.

"While the search continues for ways to help California restore affordable health coverage options for children and families and hope remains high that national health insurance reform will be enacted soon, California's decision should not diminish the accomplishments of the other states," Guyer said.

The Center for Children and Families tracks and analyzes state and federal health coverage policies and their impact on children and families.