

METRO

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Investing in children's health

Oregon could get \$39 million from the feds to cover the children of working poor; the catch is a matching \$12 million

UnCLE Sam is offering to add \$72 to every \$28 that states provide for children's health insurance. That's a good deal for children whose working-poor parents can't afford health insurance but make too much money for their kids to be covered by Medicaid.

Of the \$24 billion Congress voted to send to states through the Children's Health Insurance Program, Oregon stands to gain \$39 million. That would go a long way to helping the 50,000 low-income Oregon children without health insurance.

Unfortunately, Oregon kids may not see a dime, and that's more than too bad, that's bad policy.

Gary Dombroff, executive director of Children First for Oregon, says earlier interest by the state Department of Human Resources in capturing federal funds newly available through CHIP has waned. He fears that the \$39 million worth of health insurance earmarked for Oregon will be lost to children who need it most.

Doug Wilson, director of program and finance for the Department of Human Resources, says the state match, about \$12 million, wasn't requested in the preliminary budget sent to the governor. Wilson said the department hopes to find revenue sources that could be freed from other

programs.

That's not very reassuring.

Children need health care. Children need regular dental care and check-ups for vision and hearing. Healthy children are better prepared to learn. Without health care coverage, the physical therapy needed after accidents or emergency surgeries often isn't available.

This is too good an opportunity to miss. The 28 percent state match for an expanded CHIP is superior to the current match of 38.5 percent for federal Medicaid funds. It would extend health coverage to 16,000 kids to age 19, nearly a third of the uncovered poor.

It should be unthinkable that a state as progressive as ours, that designed the Oregon Health Plan to extend Medicaid eligibility to more of the working poor, would pass up an opportunity to provide health care to more needy children.

We urge the Department of Human Resources to go back to the drawing board with its figures and try to get as many of the federal dollars as are available. If the department has difficulty doing so, then we urge Gov. John Kitzhaber to send the budget back with suggestions. Oregon's poor kids need this money.