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# Oregon Health Plan has surplus

An additional 1,400 children in the state may receive coverage.

The Associated Press

Because of a declining caseload, the Oregon Health Plan has more money than anticipated and might be able to cover 1,400 more children than planned.

Late last year, state officials projected a \$14.5 million deficit by the end of 2001 for the health plan, which covers 350,000 people who can't afford medical coverage.

But the gloomy prediction never materialized because the plan's average caseload is running about 20,000 people fewer

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than the state Office of Medical Assistance Programs projected.

Hersh Crawford, director of the agency, said the savings total \$33 million.

Roughly 16,000 children are getting coverage through the related Children's Health Insurance Program.

Officials thought the children's program would reach full capacity in June, but with the new money, that's not likely to happen until December.

Crawford attributed the slow-

er-than-expected enrollment in the health plan in part to his agency's stepped-up efforts to determine eligibility.

Advocates for the uninsured, although pleased that more children are receiving coverage, remain concerned that the state is making it too difficult for eligible families to enroll.

"The fact of the matter is the savings wouldn't be there if they were serving all the people who are out there," said Suzanne Kunse of Children First for Ore-

gon, an advocacy group.

About 327,000 people in Oregon lack health coverage of any kind, including 68,000 children younger than 19, according to the latest state estimates.

The decrease in enrollment in the health plan "shows how necessary outreach really is," Kunse said.

A budget rebalance plan going before a legislative committee today calls for some of the savings to be used to offset a \$17.9 million loss of tobacco tax revenue caused by dwindling cigarette sales.

About \$7.7 million of the \$33 million will cover other cost increases in the health plan, leaving a net general fund savings of \$8.5 million.