
Bills would expand child health coverage

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Simple changes may help two-thirds of uninsured children

BY PETER WONG
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Advocates and legislators said Tuesday that simple steps could reduce the number of Oregon's 106,000 uninsured children by about two-thirds.

One step would be for the state to reach more parents to tell them their children may be eligible for help from state-supported health insurance, even if parents themselves are not eligible.

Child poverty

U.S. Census Bureau data about children in poverty:

AREA	CURRENT RATE	CURRENT TOTAL	PREV. RATE
Oregon	17.5%	153,263	14%
Marion Co.	18.2%	14,772	18.1%
Polk Co.	12.4%	2,000	12.5%

Current rates are based on 2002 estimates released by the Census Bureau in December; previous rates are based on 1999 data for 2000 Census.

Another step would be for the Legislature to lift requirements for waiting periods before children qualify for help.

"We know if they can have access to health care, they will not only grow up healthier but learn better," said Tina Kotek, policy director for the advocacy group Children First for Oregon.

An estimated 67,000 children qualify for, but are not enrolled in, one of three state-supported health-insurance programs.

The Oregon Health Plan covers children under the federal poverty level, and for the youngest children, up to 133 percent of that poverty level. The Children's Health Insurance Program covers children in households between 133 percent and 185 percent, depending

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