



Florida CKF Coalition Pulls Out the Stops to Enroll Children

The Problem

In 2003, some 374,000 Florida children were potentially eligible for Florida KidCare, the state's Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), but were not enrolled. The *Covering Kids & Families* statewide coalition faced an array of obstacles to closing the gap, made all the more daunting by a severe economic downturn.

Reeling from state budget shortfalls, the Florida legislature passed measures that virtually eliminated the state's ability to conduct outreach for KidCare. Coupled with the use of a waiting list beginning in July 2003, this meant that an 18-month interval passed without a single new child enrolling in Florida KidCare. The state also imposed new income documentation requirements that required both new applicants and current enrollees to actively renew their coverage. Previously, SCHIP renewal was a passive process that required no action from most families.

These measures helped to save the state money, but sharply curtailed enrollment, with the number of covered children dropping by nearly 23 percent. In November 2004, the state informed the *Covering Kids & Families* coalition that enrollment would open again in January 2005—but for one month only.

Activating Stakeholders

The Florida *Covering Kids & Families* coalition is headed by the Lawton and Rhea Chiles Center for Healthy Mothers and Babies at the University of South Florida College of Public Health. Coalition members included child advocacy groups, child care-organizations, provider groups, private health plans, private coverage programs for low-income children, the business community and minority organizations, in addition to numerous state agencies.

The Florida statewide coalition also works with some 27 community coalitions in targeted regions, including the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition, the Miami-Dade Jackson Health Care System, the Health Care District of Palm Beach County, and the Panhandle Area Health Network.

To take advantage of the open enrollment period, *Covering Kids & Families* mobilized the considerable influence of its coalition partners to spearhead a statewide communications campaign with the slogan “One Chance. One Month. Two Words. Apply Now.”

In a November 2004 conference call, 16 Florida KidCare community coordinators, representing every region of the state, pooled their ideas for outreach strategies. Plans included working with school districts, school nurses, health departments, Florida 211 (a statewide information and referral telephone service), utility companies, and even restaurants to get the word out. On November 29, 2004, the coordinators gathered, along with community and business partners and *Covering Kids & Families* coalition members, at an all-day workshop to mesh local strategies into a regional, and then a statewide, communications plan.

The statewide plan focused on four key areas: media, business activities, community-based organizations and state agencies. For example:

- The coalition planned community events, distributed toolkits that included the Florida KidCare application and advertising materials and placed radio and public access television public service announcements.
- Businesses, including CVS/Eckerd, the Florida Retail Federation and H&R Block/Jackson Hewitt, promoted the campaign and placed information on their Web sites statewide.
- The state agencies and community partners, including schools, health providers and the Florida Hospital Association, informed potentially eligible families of the upcoming enrollment period.
- Amerigroup Florida, a health plan, partnered with organizations in Central Florida, the Gulf Coast and South Florida to coordinate three large health fairs.

Applications Break All Records

The open enrollment period began January 1 and ended at 11:50 pm January 30, 2005. By the end of the month, 96,561 applications had been filed, nearly five times the previous national record of 20,000 applications during a one-month period. The number of children on those applications was estimated at between 125,000 and 175,000.

Not all applications resulted in enrollment. Just like the state government, the coalition was hamstrung by inadequate funding. In its evaluation of the open enrollment period, an [Institute for Child Health Policy report](#) said that despite a strong marketing campaign to reach families, the call-in telephone systems were “not designed to handle the resulting call volume... Expanding call center capabilities and providing sufficient planning time is essential if set open enrollment periods are ever used in the future.” The project

partners also lacked the funds and staff time to implement the full range of suggested outreach strategies. Other reasons for non-enrollment ranged from duplicate applications to ineligible people to prior enrollment.

In 2005, Florida returned to year-round enrollment for KidCare, and in July 2007, the state expanded outreach efforts, streamlined bureaucracy and increased funding for the program.

Retail vs. Wholesale

The Florida story illustrates both the power and importance of a statewide coalition in reaching children and families and the limitations of traditional outreach methods. As David Morse, RWJF Vice President for Communications who oversaw communications for *Covering Kids & Families*, noted:

Outreach is “fundamentally retail work... We were going out—in some places, door to door—into neighborhoods, trying to find kids who we thought might be eligible and broadcasting over radio and TV. Wholesale work, such as changing procedures and processes of the program—making it easier to enroll, making the documentation less burdensome, giving kids continuous enrollment so they would not be disenrolled on a regular basis, figuring out ways to retain kids—probably had a higher payoff.”