

Whole Child Equity Partnership



FIRST 5 CENTER FOR
CHILDREN'S POLICY



December 1, 2023

Governor Gavin Newsom
Office of the Governor
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of the Whole Child Equity Partnership (WCEP) - a coalition of community and statewide organizations, advocates, community organizers, direct service providers and issue area experts working across multiple sectors to advocate for holistic policies and programs that center the assets and needs of California's Black, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander and Latinx children prenatal-3 (PN-3) and their families facing the greatest systemic challenges - we write to urge you to prioritize funding for and give the financial greenlight to implement the multi-year continuous Medi-Cal coverage protection for young children in your upcoming January 2024 budget proposal.

Continuous Coverage is an Anti-Racist Solution

In our work to make California the best state to have, raise, and be a child, the WCEP is committed to advancing policy solutions that address the overarching impact and pervasiveness of structural racism that disrupts child health, well-being and family stability and this includes strengthening programs like Medi-Cal. Medi-Cal coverage is a primary source of coverage for over half of all children in the state and 3 out of 4 are children of color. Making sure children have a healthy start in life necessitates stable access to coverage, thus protecting that coverage and ensuring it is easily accessible becomes paramount to their healthy childhood development. Providing continuous Medi-Cal coverage would remove enrollment barriers for families and allow Medi-Cal to function in a similarly streamlined manner to employer-based coverage, whereby annual renewal is automatic.

Continuous Coverage Improves Children's Access to Medi-Cal Coverage

The pandemic underscored the importance of focusing on families in greatest need and ensuring that programs and systems are designed to work effectively for them. One notable policy that has proven to be a significant success during challenging times was the continuous Medicaid coverage protection implemented during the public health emergency (PHE). Without those protections, California children enrolled in Medi-Cal

faced gaps in their Medi-Cal coverage as procedural hurdles caused them to lose coverage.

The national demonstration with continuous coverage protections speaks volumes about its effectiveness. Most notably, during the pandemic, the uninsured rate for California children dropped from 3.6 percent to 3.2 percent –a 11% drop. Continuous coverage not only protected children from becoming uninsured, it reduced the uninsurance rate, even during a pandemic.

Unfortunately, the unwinding of the federal continuous coverage protection is resulting in far more children losing Medi-Cal coverage. Despite the Department's laudable efforts, over 150,000 children were dropped from Medi-Cal in the first 4 months since renewals requirements were restored. Most frustratingly, it is projected that three-fourths of dropped children remain eligible.

Based on narratives gathered during recently conducted focus groups, families are working hard to keep their insurance and a loss in coverage is stressful for families even for a short period of time. Most families we spoke to find out their child's coverage has been dropped when they are seeking care. Even short gaps in coverage can become a "nightmare" when at an emergency room or seeking life-sustaining medication.

The Solution is Clear- Fund Continuous Coverage for Young Children in the 2024-2025 Budget

With your leadership and that of the Legislature, California has adopted in the 2022-23 Budget a continuous Medi-Cal coverage protection for young children ages 0-5. However, the budget policy is conditional, requiring Department of Finance's (DOF) financial approval in 2024 to let implementation go forward. Waiting until Spring 2024 for DOF to greenlight this policy would delay implementation and more children will needlessly lose their Medi-Cal coverage in the interim. DHCS is ready to implement this protection for children and the time is now to continue your leadership and demonstrate your commitment to California's children.

By proposing funding and greenlighting the policy for implementation in your January Budget, DHCS can start to move forward with the steps to make this protection operational by January 2025, bringing peace of mind to California children and families.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to witnessing California's continued dedication to the health and prosperity of California's babies, toddlers and young children.

In Solidarity,

Members of the Whole Child Equity Partnership:

BlackECE

Californians for Justice

Catalyst California

Community Coalition

Families in Schools

First 5 Association of California

First5LA

GRACE & End Child Poverty CA

InnerCity Struggle

San Diego Community Birth Center

The Children's Partnership

Ventures