

Wash. Co. now helping families get kids enrolled for insurance

Since last spring, Washington County's Commission on Children and Families has been managing three grants that fund outreach to and enrollment of uninsured children and youth into Oregon's Healthy Kids insurance plans. In February, the Commission received a Targeted Outreach Grant from the Oregon Department of Human Services for conducting outreach activities to uninsured children and youth in "hard to reach" Washington County families. Subsequently, the Commission was asked to manage two similar grants on behalf of the Beaverton School District and the Oregon School Based Health Care Network.

Alina Maldonado, MSW, works for the Commission and provides support for seven outreach workers hired under these three grants to serve the

Banks, Beaverton, Gaston, Forest Grove, Tigard-Tualatin and Sherwood School Districts. An outreach grant also was awarded to Youth Contact for serving families in the Hillsboro School District. Maldonado coordinates countywide outreach efforts with Youth Contact's two Hillsboro outreach workers, as well as with other community health and social service agencies that can enroll children in Healthy Kids.

"Healthy Kids extends the Oregon Health Plan, offering more health coverage options to more families," says Maldonado. "While the plan is aimed at low-income families, it also offers insurance to families that can afford it but can't get it through their work." The plan is available for children and teens up to their 19th birthday.

"The coverage is very good,"

explains Maldonado. "Medical, dental and vision care are included, so are prescriptions and medical equipment. It also includes regular check-ups and preventive care, and mental health and chemical dependency services."

For a family of four with a total income of less than \$44,000, comprehensive health insurance is provided to children and youth at no cost to the family. Between \$44,000 to \$66,000 per year for a family of four, the insurance is very low cost, averaging \$50 a month for two children. Families with higher incomes who do not have insurance can buy the coverage at full-cost. Children are eligible even if they have been denied insurance coverage for "pre-existing conditions."

The Commission's team of outreach and enrollment workers are stationed at school district-based Family Resource Centers, and are closely allied with the school districts they serve. "In fact," Maldonado says, "our workers are considered school officials. They carry school district I.D., have

school district email addresses, and district staff can make direct referrals to our outreach workers." The close relationship with the schools helps the workers identify uninsured children and youth who are likely candidates for the program.

The outreach workers help teachers to watch out for subtler signs that a student might need medical attention or one of the program benefits. For instance, if a student were to have difficulty in school because she could not see the board at the front of class, the student's parents might be contacted so that the student could get the vision benefits that are offered by the program.

One full-time outreach and enrollment worker serves the Forest Grove, Banks and Gaston area, two part-time workers cover Tigard, Tualatin and Sherwood and four full and part-time workers provide outreach to children and youth in Beaverton. Additionally Youth Contact employs two full-time outreach workers to serve families in Hillsboro. While the workers are based at the Family Resource Centers, they visit people's homes and go out into the community to make the program known and enroll new children. They also go to places like summer food program sites, summer schools, churches, low-income housing, and even to employers that do not offer health insurance to their

employees.

"One of the problems we have had is that people think this is simply the same as the Oregon Health Plan. They don't realize that the door for Healthy Kids insurance is 'wide open.'" Maldonado reports that so far the Commission's outreach workers have helped families complete Healthy Kids applications for over 600 children and youth.

For more information about Healthy Kids in Washington County, call the Commission on Children and Families, 503-846-4539. Information is also available at: www.oregon.gov/DHS/healthykids/index.shtml.

Healthy eating for diabetics

Unravel "Label Lingo" for Healthy Eating with Diabetes, is the title of a free 90-minute presentation on Wednesday, September 22, at 6:00 p.m.

Do you find information on labels overwhelming? Question the accuracy of the information? Come learn the facts about what to look for when reading labels. The session is designed to include group participation.

Though free, attendees are asked to register by calling 503-681-1700. The location will be the Tuality Health Education Center, 334 SE 8th Ave., Hillsboro.

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