

ROOTING FOR KIDS!

News for The Children's Hospital's Grassroots Advocates

www.TheChildrensHospital.org/advocacy

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Healthcare Reform on the Horizon...

As a grassroots advocate for The Children's Hospital, you know that we are a group of people (4,000 strong!) who care about kids' health and well-being and want to make a difference. But the question often begs - HOW do we go about doing that?

Clearly, our advocates are never under any obligation to take action, but our hope is that each of our advocates will feel moved to speak up clearly and powerfully for kids when public policy decisions are being made - whether it's forwarding an email, making a phone call, or simply sharing information with their friends and neighbors to help garner public awareness about an issue.

While our advocates are not required to attend any meetings, we do like to offer opportunities to learn more about child health advocacy issues in Colorado, and give our advocates the tools they need to speak intelligently and persuasively about important health care issues that affect every family in Colorado.

Healthcare in Colorado is at a critical juncture. The decisions made in the coming months and years will impact its citizens for generations to come.



On January 31, The Colorado Blue Ribbon Commission for Healthcare will present their final healthcare reform recommendations to our state legislature.

The Blue Ribbon Commission (also referred to as the 208 Commission), was established through the passage Senate Bill 208 during the 2006 state legislative session. The Commission was created to

study and recommend healthcare reform models for expanding coverage, especially for the uninsured and underinsured, and to decrease healthcare costs for Colorado residents. Over the past year, Commissioners have been collecting data, doing research, and hosting town meetings across the state in an effort to present a package of comprehensive recommendations to the Colorado legislature.

The Children's Hospital is proud to be hosting six Blue Ribbon Commissioners on **Wednesday, Jan. 30** for an interactive forum, **Healthcare on the Horizon**, the evening before they present their recommendations to state officials. We are pleased to offer our advocates the opportunity for some insight into the recommendations the Commission is bringing forward, as well as the potential opportunities for change that accompany them. We hope you will gather your friends and colleagues to join us at this important event. Information on this event can be found at:

www.TheChildrensHospital.org/Advocacy. Click on "Advocacy Events."

SCHIP Update

On Jan. 23, the U.S. House failed yet again to muster the votes necessary to override the president's veto and fund SCHIP - a critical source of health insurance coverage for more than 6 million children in this country.

SCHIP, a joint federal and state program, was first enacted in 1997 with bipartisan support. Its 10-year authorization expired last September, and while it now has a temporary extension until March 2009, members from both sides of the aisle in Congress have been working to renew and expand the program.

Here in Colorado, SCHIP covers more than 50,000 children and 1,300 pregnant women. The bill would have increased Colorado's SCHIP funding by 8 percent, or \$13 million, allowing us to cover the more than 56,000 children who are eligible but who are not enrolled in the program. Without reauthorization, Colorado's SCHIP program will start running a deficit by 2011, which would jeopardize even the kids who are currently enrolled.

It is important to note that the Bush administration claims the compromise bill would cover children in families of four with incomes up to \$82,600. The truth is only two states, New York and New Jersey, would be allowed to offer coverage to families earning up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level. This program is available to Colorado families under 200 percent of federal poverty level, which is an annual income of \$41,300 or less for a family of four.

The Children's Hospital will continue to monitor efforts to reauthorize SCHIP over the coming year, stay tuned for more details throughout 2008!

SAVE THE DATE!

Lunch & Learn

Tues. Feb. 26

Noon - 1 p.m.

Children's lobbyist, Ruth Aponte will share her perspective on the 2008 legislative session, discuss some of the issues The Children's Hospital is currently monitoring, and give her take on the Colorado political landscape heading into the 2008 elections. Lunch provided free. RSVP to: www.TheChildrensHospital.org/advocacy Click on "Advocacy Events."



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CO State of the State Address

On January 10, Gov. Bill Ritter gave his annual State of the State Address. The following is an excerpt from the healthcare piece of that speech for those who missed it:

...In just a few weeks, you will receive the final report from the 208 Commission on Health Care Reform. They know better than anyone that there's no magic bullet to fix a system that is so fundamentally broken.

But we began repairing that system in 2007, improving access for the uninsured, especially vulnerable populations — low-income children, fragile senior citizens and others who live at the margins and need immediate assistance. Last year, we enrolled 10,000 more kids into Children's Health Plan Plus.

We also addressed the cost issue in a number of substantive ways. We launched a "medical home" program for Medicaid children that focuses on prevention to reduce expensive emergency room visits. The GEM review also identified ways to save millions of dollars by eliminating waste and preventing Medicaid fraud. As we find efficiencies, cut waste and bring more transparency to the system, we can reinvest those savings back into the system.

This year, we'll continue to aggressively work on cost and access issues. My Fiscal Year 08-09 budget request calls for enrolling 17,000 more eligible children into CHP+, and we'll be undertaking major efforts to enroll more eligible families in Medicaid by simplifying, streamlining and modernizing the application and administrative processes.

On cost control, we'll be launching five new disease-management programs and fully funding the Childhood Immunization Information System, two steps that will yield significant savings over the long run. I'm also directing my health care team to spearhead a collaborative effort that will address cost and quality. We will bring all stakeholders — including insurance companies, hospitals and physicians — to the table. Many of them have personally committed to me they will stay at the table for the long haul, for what I like to call a little corporate introspection.

Some of these ideas are born from the 208 Commission, and they are an acknowledgment that we must take a staged and thoughtful approach to systemic reform.

In all of my travels across Colorado, I hear anger and frustration from people about cost, quality and access. And people are frustrated that Washington has failed to craft a national solution. Maybe a new president will change that. But in Colorado, we won't wait for reforms to come from Washington. Instead, we will make smart changes to the system and do what we can afford as we work toward our long-term goals.

Rep. Christine Scanlan (D - Dillon)



District: 56 - covering Eagle, Lake and Summit counties.

Previous Occupation: Nonprofit Management
Political Experience: Was appointed by vacancy committee in December 2007 to fill Dan Gibbs House seat when he moved on to the Senate.

2007 Committees: Agriculture, Livestock & Natural Resources; Transportation & Energy.

Education: BA in History, and Master's in Nonprofit Management from Regis University.

Personal: Scanlan was born in 1964 in Littleton, CO and moved to Summit County at age 3. She now serves on the Summit School District Board of Education, and lives in Dillon with her husband, Tim and three daughters, Catherine, Julia, and Elise.

KidIssues and KidFacts

A group of parents and organizations have come together to introduce a bill into the state legislature this year which would require private insurance companies to cover the cost of hearing aids for children. (NOTE: self insured plans would be exempt.)

Senate Bill 57, sponsored by Senator Ken Kester (R- Las Animas) and Representative Rosemary Marshall (D- Denver), is being actively supported by a coalition of organizations, including The Children's Hospital.

Approximately 180 babies are born each year in Colorado in need of hearing aids, and eighty percent of children require aids in both ears. Unfortunately, the \$1500-\$6000 average cost of hearing aids prompts some families to wait to get them for their children or avoid replacing them as frequently as necessary, which can have extremely detrimental effects on a child's development.

Providing hearing aids to children as early as possible in their lives is critical to their overall development of speech and language because the ability to hear is directly tied to one's ability to speak. Making an investment in a child's hearing early on pays off not only in that child's quality of life, it also pays off from an economic standpoint. Children who go without effective treatment for hearing loss are much more likely to need special education and public support throughout their life. A John Hopkins University study indicates an education cost savings of up to \$200,000 per child as a result of appropriate intervention within the first year of life. Additionally, untreated hearing loss in children results in adults who are less likely to be employed and who can require a lifetime of public assistance and insurance support.

In addition to supporting this bill through pitching stories to the media and offering expert medical testimony, The Children's Hospital is working closely with patient families who receive services through the Bill Daniels Center for Children's Hearing to generate support and awareness. We will be counting on our advocates to join us in this effort, by responding to our email action alerts on Senate Bill 57. For more information about this bill or other bills Children's is working on this session: www.thechildrenshospital.org/advocacy. Click on "Legislative Issues."



The Children's Hospital

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