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N.M. Aims to Expand Health Plan for Kids

By [Kate Nash](#)
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SANTA FE - The state is looking for thousands of New Mexico kids who qualify for its health care coverage but whose parents might not know it.

To find them, eligibility workers this weekend will scour storefronts and sidewalks in 19 locations statewide. Later in the year, they will set up shop in 46 New Mexico schools.

The goal of the outreach is to enroll as many children as possible in New Mexikids, the state's free or low-cost health plan.

Registering now can save parents time and paperwork, said Kay Monaco, executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children.

"Often, because kids are really healthy, parents don't think it's important to sign up. But it is," Monaco said.

"When they do get sick, it makes it easier to access health care and ensures doctors can get paid quickly, which helps keep the system moving quickly," she said.

About 21,000 New Mexico children age 5 and under don't have health insurance. Of those, 16,000 live in a household with an income that qualifies them for a Medicaid program.

To qualify for New Mexikids, a three-person household must earn less than \$39,010.

The registration events are timed with back-to-school shopping and the state's second annual tax holiday on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Residents can also register during the New Mexico State Fair in Albuquerque, which runs Sept. 8-23.

"Health insurance is just as important as paper and pencils to start out the school year," Human Services Secretary Pam Hyde said in a statement.

Monaco also said the program covers preventive care, which might help diagnose a hearing or eyesight problem that could affect a student's performance in school.

"You don't have to wait until your kid gets sick," she said.

The event comes after the Legislature this year approved Year of the Child initiatives aimed at helping the state get more families insured.

SMART BOX

What is New Mexikids?

A no- or low-cost health care plan for children 19 and younger. It covers medical and dental visits, prescriptions, hospital care, glasses and hearing and vision exams.

What does it cost?

For many participants, it costs \$5 to visit a doctor, \$2 for a prescription, \$15 for an emergency room visit and \$25 for an in-patient visit.

How to sign up:

In Albuquerque, get information this weekend at the Smith's at 6001 Lomas Blvd. N.E. or the Smith's at 2620 Carlisle Blvd. N.E.

You can also sign up from 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Friday and 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday at both locations.

For more information:

Call (888) 997-2583, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

You can also apply at most schools, primary care providers, hospitals and clinics.

The allocations include \$4.6 million to expand Medicaid outreach to children and \$3.7 million to cover new children and adolescents by making it easier for them to qualify for Medicaid.

The state has changed its rules so residents who don't qualify for Medicaid can get help with insurance premiums.

This year's attention to the uninsured is part of Gov. Bill Richardson's plan to insure as many New Mexicans as possible in a state that's typically at the bottom of the list for its percentage of people with health insurance.

Next year, Richardson plans to ask state lawmakers for \$77 million to reduce the number of residents without insurance by almost 60,000 over two years. That plan is aimed at adults.

So who is uninsured in the state?

The Human Services Department and New Mexico State University in 2004 hired a polling firm to find out.

The highest concentrations of residents without insurance appear to live in northern and southern New Mexico.

American Indians are most likely to be uninsured, followed by Hispanics and non-Spanish Anglos, the survey found.

Of uninsured adults, 17 percent work full time, 31 percent are self-employed and 31 percent work in seasonal employment. Forty-one percent work multiple part-time jobs.

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