

Mississippi Health Advocacy Program NEWS

MHAP News

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MHAP

Mississippi Health Advocacy Programs (MHAP) combines research, analysis and grass-roots organizing to improve health policies, practices and funding in Mississippi, especially in support of the state's poor and underserved people.

Trouble Applying for Medicaid?

Please report any problems or concerns you or your clients may be having applying for Medicaid benefits. Please call the Mississippi Center for Justice **MEDICAID HELP LINE** at **1-877-352-2269**.

The Heat is On: 2008 Legislative Session

The 2008 Legislative Session officially began on Tuesday, January 8th, but they have yet to fully get in the swing of things. There were a few "housekeeping" issues that had to be taken care of and are still pending. With statewide elections held just in November, issues such as elections of Speaker of the House and Speaker Pro-Tem in the Senate had to be resolved, in addition to committee chairmen being assigned for the new session. Speaker McCoy was reelected as Speaker of the House in a tight contest between Representative Jeff Smith. The Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the House have both named their committee chairmen. There have even been amendments passed to shorten the legislative session this year from 125 to 103 days. The enormity of the problems Mississippi faces, make these the least of legislators' worries.

Once again, the usual suspects of public education and Medicaid are at the forefront of the legislative agenda. With the budget projections being substantially less than expected, the Legislature will have to make some pretty hard trade-offs. The campaign promises of the candidates to fully fund education will now be expected to be delivered on. Medicaid's \$86 million FY 2008 and \$168 million FY 2009 needs place an increased sense of immediacy on legislators that they have been able to avoid in previous years. There has been much discussion around increasing the cigarette tax to and implementing a "hospital assessment" to fill the gap in Medicaid's budget, but it remains to be seen which one wins out. The new blood flowing in both the House and Senate can lead to some unpredictability, but also a chance to look at old problems in a newer, more creative light. However this session turns out, it will be one marked by essential and urgent competing priorities and tough decisions.

Let's Talk About Coverage Expansion

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and Northeast Mississippi regions of the state. It is our hope to build on what was started by getting everyday people's input on solutions that work for them. We will be providing updates on these dialogues as we move further along in the process.

SCHIP Update: A Renewed Call to Duty

The ongoing battle for SCHIP expansion has been put on the backburner for this year at least. In December, President Bush signed into law S. 2499, Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP Extension Act that will extend SCHIP until March 31, 2009. The bill provides additional funding for shortfall states such as Mississippi to ensure that those currently on the rolls can stay there, but it doesn't allow for any coverage expansion of the program. Additionally, the bill fails to include provisions to replace the Administration's damaging August 17th directive to state Medicaid directors with more appropriate and realistic provisions for ensuring that the lowest-income children in a state are enrolled first. There is still much work to be done in the new year in terms of expanding health coverage for children.