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Secretary

NEWS RELEASE

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Study: Fewer Louisiana children lack health coverage *Statewide survey sheds light on the state's uninsured population*

Baton Rouge --- A comprehensive survey of Louisiana residents shows the number of uninsured children in state has dropped dramatically in the past two years.

The 2005 Louisiana Health Insurance Survey, conducted by the LSU Public Policy Research Lab for the Department of Health and Hospitals, provides specific information about health care coverage in Louisiana. Health officials will use the results of this survey to better target outreach and enrollment for its LaCHIP and Medicaid programs. The first survey of this kind was conducted in 2003.

“My priority of reducing the number of uninsured in our state was adopted as a goal of the Governor’s Health Care Reform Panel, and I am pleased that we have been able to make such significant strides in addressing this critical health care problem,” said Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco. “We know that children who are insured will have access to primary and preventive care, which will improve their overall health status. Having this access to affordable health care during their formative years is one of the most important components for quality child development. As we increase our expectations for academic achievement, it is only appropriate that we set high physical and mental development expectations for our children. We know that unhealthy children cannot learn. Getting these kids insured will help to ensure good physical and mental health.”

In this survey, more than 10,000 Louisiana households representing more than 27,000 residents were contacted between February and July 2005. Since the survey ended before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the data does not show the effect these storms had on the number of people with health coverage in Louisiana.

The 2005 survey shows slightly more than 7 percent of Louisiana children younger than 19 are uninsured. This is a reduction from the 11 percent uninsured rate for this age group in the 2003 survey and represents an increase in coverage for more than 55,000 children in the past two years. According to data compiled by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the national average uninsured rate for children is 12 percent. At 7 percent, Louisiana would be one of the top 10 states with the lowest uninsured rates for children.

Researchers attributed the decline to outreach efforts by Medicaid staff to enroll more eligible children into state-sponsored health insurance programs. Medicaid staff attend health fairs and community events and work with non-profit organizations and other government agencies across the state to raise awareness about health coverage offered by Medicaid for children, pregnant women and other groups.

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“Using this year’s information, we can begin 2006 by continuing our effort to find and enroll those who qualify for our Medicaid programs so they are more likely to receive primary and preventive care, which will reduce their risk for serious illnesses later,” said DHH Secretary Dr. Fred Cerise. “The decline in uninsured children since the 2003 survey shows that this data can be very effective in improving health coverage in our state.”

The most dramatic improvement in the decreased rate of uninsured children were in the Southwest area of the state, including Lake Charles, and Northwest Louisiana, including Shreveport and the surrounding parishes. The Medicaid program specifically targeted both of these areas for outreach after the 2003 survey showed high numbers of children who were eligible, but not enrolled in, traditional Medicaid programs or the LaCHIP, which provides health coverage to uninsured children from working families.

The number of Louisiana adults ages 19-65 without health coverage increased slightly over the past few years, though this increase may be attributed more to changes in survey methods than actual changes in the number of uninsured adults. Overall, the rate of uninsured adults has increased from 21.1 percent in 2003 to 23.4 percent for 2005. This change reflects national trends among adults and highlights the need to continue efforts to improve access to care for the adult population.

There were large increases among uninsured adults in Southwest, Central and Northwest Louisiana, and there were decreases in Northeast Louisiana and the Acadiana area.

Overall, the demographic information about the uninsured is similar to the 2003 survey findings. Young adults ages 18-34 are the least likely to be insured. This population is the segment that often falls through the cracks if they do not enroll in employer-sponsored insurance because they are too old for LaCHIP, do not qualify for other Medicaid programs, are too young for Medicare and cannot afford private health insurance.

Overall, there was a statewide decrease in the number of children and adults covered through employer-sponsored health insurance programs, while Medicaid enrollment increased during the past two years. The decline was most dramatic for children. In 2003, 47 percent of children were covered through insurance from a parent’s job. That number dropped to 36 percent for 2005.

Education and income levels also are predictors of insurance status, according to the survey. As a person’s education level and income increases, the person’s likelihood of being uninsured decreases. Adults with low incomes are more likely to be uninsured than children from low-income families. However, children of very low-income families are more likely to be insured than children from families with slightly more income. Researchers feel this may be because children of very low-income families are more likely to qualify for state coverage.

To see the complete survey, visit www.medicaid.dhh.louisiana.gov. To receive more information about the various Medicaid programs or to find out how to apply, visit the Web site or call toll free, 1-888-342-6207.

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