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Millions More Americans Now Eligible for Government Health Coverage Under New Federal Poverty Level Guidelines

Increases predate President Obama's signing of SCHIP legislation Feb 4

San Jose, Calif. – February 5, 2009 – America's uninsured and working poor looking to qualify for public health programs got an economic assist in January as the 2009 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) guidelines were increased by the federal government. The end result is an increase in the number of citizens who can qualify for free or low cost government health insurance.

While President Obama's signing of a bill on February 4 to increase health insurance for children will be enacted in the near future, these guidelines are in effect now.

County, state and federal sponsored health coverage programs set eligibility requirements based on the FPL guidelines that are updated every year. The following is a sample range of how the increase impacts programs in different states.

- New York - The income level for a family of four qualifying for Child Health Plus increased from \$53,000 to \$55,125 a year at 250% of the FPL
- Hawaii – Eligible family income has increased from \$48,760 for a family of four at 200% of the FPL to \$76,080 for a family of four at 300% of the FPL for coverage under Hawaii's Medical Service Association Children's Plan
- California – The income level for a family of three (married, pregnant woman) qualifying for Access for Infants and Mothers, increased from \$52,800 to \$54,930 at 300% of the FPL

"It's important to get the word out about these increases because over 33% of the 47 million uninsured in America are eligible for government-sponsored health insurance but aren't signed up," said Phil Lebherz, founder of the non-profit Foundation for Health Coverage Education (FHCE). Charged with the mission of educating Americans about their public and private insurance options, the organization works through its free U.S. Uninsured Help Line (1-800-234-1317) to help enroll people in public program offerings.

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The number of individuals designated as “poor” has increased approximately 10% over the last decade.

National poverty data are calculated using the official Census definition of poverty. Under this definition, poverty is determined by comparing pretax cash income with the poverty threshold, which adjusts for family size and composition. In 2007, more than 36.5 million people, about 12.5 percent of the total U.S. population, lived in poverty.

Through FHCE’s website – www.coverageforall.org – information on available coverage, eligibility, monthly cost and 175 public program applications for all 50 states are available. Its free **U.S. Uninsured Help Line** (1-800-234-1317) provides live, one-on-one assistance and is staffed 24/7 to provide basic screening for both public and private health coverage. To review increases state by state visit http://coverageforall.org/pdf/FHCE_FedPovertyLevel.pdf.

The Foundation for Health Coverage Education (FHCE) is a non-profit 501(c)3 public organization based in San Jose, California.

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