

Popular Health Coverage Option for DC Children in Jeopardy

By Jodi Kwarciany

As the new year begins, a critical health care program that serves millions of children across the country continues to be in limbo: the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP. Unless reauthorized by Congress, this could cost the District millions to maintain coverage for families and potentially jeopardize options for DC families in the future.

CHIP is a lifeline for many. It provides affordable health coverage to children whose families have modest earnings but too much to qualify for Medicaid, creating access to critical services like check-ups, immunizations, and emergency services. In DC, CHIP covers around 13,000 children from families with incomes up to 319 percent of the federal poverty level, or about \$65,000 for a family of three. The District's CHIP program is funded entirely by federal dollars.



Even though CHIP has bipartisan support, funding ended on September 30 when Congress failed to reauthorize it. There is enough leftover federal funding in states' unspent allotments and grants, but many will run out of funds beginning this year. To help, Congress recently passed a short-term, \$3 billion spending bill that will keep CHIP funded through March. Still, this provides little security for the families that rely on CHIP, and for states and DC facing drastic program or budget decisions.

District leaders are working hard to call attention to the issue. In October, Mayor Bowser signed a [letter to Congress](#) along with 30 other Mayors from around the country urging them to reauthorize CHIP. And recently, DC's Department of Health Care Finance, the agency that oversees the District's CHIP program, released an important [message](#) answering questions CHIP families may have.

The good news in DC is that no matter what happens in Congress, program eligibility or coverage for DC CHIP will remain the same for now. That's because DC, like several other states, is required to maintain current CHIP eligibility standards until the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. If CHIP funding runs out, children currently enrolled in CHIP would be switched to Medicaid coverage instead. Under this scenario, the federal government would cover 70 percent of costs for Medicaid, instead of 100 percent of the cost as it normally does for CHIP.

Still, that leaves DC potentially on the hook for large sums of money to cover what the federal government would no longer fund. DC would need to come up with several millions of local dollars for the remainder of FY 2018, and as much as \$14 million for FY 2019, if Congress fails to reauthorize CHIP.

CHIP coverage is essential to thousands of District families. Congress should reauthorize this critical program and extend it well into the future. For questions about CHIP coverage in DC, contact DCMedicaidquestion@dc.gov.