



News Release

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Too Many Child Health Programs Still at Risk

President Bush's FY09 Budget Boosts Funding for SCHIP, but slashes funding for many other programs key to children's health

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Saying it's time to make children's well-being a top priority, on Monday the American Academy of Pediatrics called on Congress to restore and increase federal funding for a wide range of children's health programs President Bush wants to cut or even eliminate.

The President's FY09 budget released Monday surprisingly increases funding for the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)—though it still falls short of the \$35 billion needed to cover 4 million additional eligible low-income children. At the same time, his budget slashes more than \$2 billion from discretionary health and human services programs, including many for children. In addition, Bush has proposed trimming costs in Medicaid, the health safety net for the nation's poorest children, by \$18 billion over the next five years.

“President Bush is moving in the right direction by acknowledging we need to invest in SCHIP and work towards taking it off the critical list,” said Renee R. Jenkins, MD, FAAP, president of the Academy, which represents 60,000 pediatricians across the country. “But it's like robbing Peter to pay Paul. We understand the need to make tough economic choices—the families of the children we treat do that every day. But cutting so many programs aimed at helping this generation of children grow up healthy and ready to learn and lead productive lives is short-sighted.”

Last year's SCHIP reauthorization, passed with overwhelming bipartisan support by Congress but vetoed twice by the president, would have tapped tobacco taxes to pay for children's health-care, rather than drain the money from other health-care programs. In addition, the president's proposed SCHIP increase-- \$19.7 billion over the next five years—may be too little, too late. It fails to keep pace with anticipated shortfalls in the program, putting at risk some of the 6 million children currently covered by the program and putting health care coverage even farther out of reach for many of the remaining 6 million eligible but uncovered children.

The president's budget isn't all bad news, Jenkins acknowledged. Among the bright spots: an extra \$149 million for Head Start and \$50 million more for the overstretched Food and Drug Administration. But it falls far short of the vow he made in his final State of the Union address just a week earlier. “We share a common goal,” Bush said in that address, “making health care more affordable and accessible for all Americans.”

“The President's spending plan unfortunately does the opposite,” Jenkins said. “It makes health care *less* affordable and accessible for too many families. We will work with Congress to make sure our government does more, not less, for children's health and well-being. We need to invest in their health and their futures.”

The president's budget maintains current funding for many key programs aimed at children and adolescents, including child welfare and abuse prevention programs, child care and development grants, and crucial medical research at the National Institutes of Health. Squeezed by rising costs and needs, failure to increase money for these programs leaves them struggling to do more with less.

In addition, the president's proposed budget fails to adequately fund numerous programs that affect children and adolescents, including:

- **Medicaid:** The president proposes trimming anticipated Medicaid spending \$18 billion over the next five years, a move that will cause a ripple effect across the states making it harder for the country's poorest and disabled children to get the health care they need. When federal Medicaid money is cut, so are state matching funds;
- **Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMSC):** The budget eliminates funding for a program critical to improving ambulance and emergency room care for critically ill and injured children. A 2006 Institute of Medicine report called the program "relevant and vital;"
- **Universal Newborn Hearing screening:** Eliminates funding for a program credited for ensuring that 95% of all infants are checked for hearing problems. Early intervention can vastly improve a child's language development, school achievement and social interactions;
- **Education and Training:** Eliminates funding for the Title VII health professions program and the Children's Graduate Medical Education Program. CHGME is critical to training pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists, supporting research into pediatric medical issues as well as providing care for many of the country's sickest children.
- **National Children's Study:** Eliminates funding for a ground-breaking study aimed at examining the effects of environmental influences on the health of some 100,000 children over a 21-year period, information that could be critical in helping researchers and doctors address such chronic conditions and diseases as asthma and obesity, potentially saving billions of dollars and improving child health;
- **Poison Control Centers:** Cuts funding by two-thirds (\$17 million).

The Academy will work with Congress as it takes the President's budget—a blueprint for spending in the fiscal year that starts in October 2008—to ensure that, through the budget and appropriations process, children's health care is among America's top spending priorities.

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The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.