



## Removing the 5 Year Wait for Legal Immigrant Children – Florida KidCare Eligibility

### SB 704 by Sen. Garcia | HB 4023 by Rep. Diaz

- In 2009, Congress gave states the option to allow legal immigrant children to qualify for Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) without having to endure the five-year waiting period that applies to most public assistance programs for immigrants.
- Presently, 21 states allow legal immigrant children to enroll in Medicaid or CHIP without a waiting period. Florida does not and legal immigrant children are required to have been living in the country for five years in order to be eligible for Florida KidCare.
- Low-income immigrant children who are not insured are less likely to receive preventive health care and more likely to use hospital emergency rooms as their source of health care. Extending coverage to legal immigrant children will likely not only improve their health status, but also reduce the cost of uncompensated care in the health system as a whole.
- In 2012, Legislative staff analysis of SB 1294 estimated that 20,550 legal immigrant children would be eligible for and enroll in KidCare in 2013. This would increase total KidCare enrollment by only one percent!(factoring for year-over-year enrollment growth).
- If enacted in 2013-14:
  - The maximum cost to the state of extending coverage to legal immigrant children would be \$17.6 million.
  - To pay for it there is unspent state funds already earmarked for children’s health coverage as well as money freed up as a result of increased federal match rates. This means there is a bare minimum of \$39.1 million in state funding available to fund this important coverage.
  - Investment in coverage of these otherwise uninsured children will draw down an additional \$43.1 million in federal funds.
  - I’d be happy to provide to you and your staff with a cost brief detailing all of this information.
- Legal immigrant children are a new eligibility group and considered “targeted low-income children.” As a result, Florida can claim the higher federal match rate for all of them, regardless of whether enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP. The state’s share for all newly eligible, legal immigrant children would therefore be only 28.9 percent next year, saving Florida \$6.1 million.
- It is important to note that CHIPRA **does not** permit states to eliminate the waiting period for adult legal immigrants, with the exception of pregnant women.
- **Undocumented immigrants** always have been and continue to be ineligible for both Medicaid and CHIP, regardless of how long they have resided in the U.S.

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