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Medical Needs of 6.2 Million U.S. Kids Go Unmet

Study says initiatives should target both coverage and access to health care

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FRIDAY, Jan. 30 (HealthDay News) -- Children who do not have health insurance and no regular source of health care are the most likely to have unmet medical needs, researchers at the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital report.

HealthDay

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The findings show that the government needs to do more to safeguard the health of vulnerable children, said the researchers, who noted the number of children with unmet medical needs increased from 4.5 million in 1998 to 6.2 million in 2006.

The analysis of U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

data showed that:

*From 1998 to 2006, there was an increase in the proportion of children enrolled in public programs and a decrease in the proportion with private insurance.

*The rate of uninsured children remained at about 10 percent between 2002 and 2006, but the proportion of uninsured children with no usual source of care (USC) increased to 23 percent in 2006.

*Hispanic children now account for the largest proportion of uninsured children and those with no USC.

*Private medical practices continued to be a USC for the majority of children, regardless of insurance status. However, there's been a recent decrease in the rates of uninsured and SCHIP-enrolled children who have a private practice as a USC.

*Uninsured children and those with no USC are more likely to have unmet medical needs than privately insured children with a USC.

*Publicly insured children are twice as likely to have unmet medical needs as children with private insurance.

The findings, published in the February issue of *Pediatrics*, show that government programs such as Medicaid, the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and the President's Health Center Initiative don't fully address the health-care needs of the most vulnerable children, said lead author Dr. Leesha K. Hoilette, a pediatric health services research fellow in the Child Health Evaluation and Research Unit in the U-M Division of General Pediatrics.

"As the nation continues to focus on the future of health care, and, in particular, health care for children, it seems insufficient to focus policy efforts on either health-care coverage or access alone. Initiatives must be targeted in tandem to increase both coverage and access to reduce unmet medical need," Hoilette said in a U-M news release.

More information

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation has more about health coverage for children.

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