



May 10, 1996

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New Health Program For Children Wins Broad Community Support

JACKSONVILLE, FL -- Affordable health insurance for Duval County children is now available through an innovative state program called Healthy Kids. This program allows uninsured children to access health care benefits through a local Health Maintenance Organizations (HMO).

"When children have the security of preventive care through a quality health plan, they stay healthier," said Dr. Larry Zenke, superintendent for the Duval County School System. "Healthy children are better prepared for learning and their performance is superior. I am glad our schools could play a leadership role in making our community's children healthier."

Duval Healthy Kids provides comprehensive health insurance for public or private school children from 3 through 19 years of age and their 1 to 5 year-old siblings who are not yet enrolled in school. All uninsured or underinsured children are eligible to apply for the program.

The health coverage is provided by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida's (BCBSF) HMO, Health Options, Inc. Duval Healthy Kids, in partnership with BCBSF's Health Options, will provide the opportunity for children to receive consistent, preventive care rather than getting care only in emergency situations.

"These children have the benefit of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida's 52 years of experience in providing quality, affordable health coverage," said Paul Jennings, regional vice president for BCBSF's Northeast Florida operations. "And, children covered by Duval Healthy Kids will have their own doctor to ensure they are getting proper preventive care like early detection of health problems, regular immunizations and screenings."

Duval Healthy Kids' extensive benefits include well child care visits, doctors' office visits, inpatient hospital care, hearing and vision screening, eyeglasses, preventive dental and much more. A special network of providers, developed by Baptist/St. Vincent's Health System in conjunction with area primary care physicians and specialists, provides comprehensive care that specifically meets the needs of Duval County's children.

"Children covered by Duval Healthy Kids have access to five of the area's best hospitals in addition to other health care facilities that are renowned for their specialized pediatric care," said Dr. Jack Groover, chief executive officer of the Baptist/St. Vincent's Integrated Delivery Organization (IDO) -- the special network developed for the Duval Healthy Kids program. "With this special network of providers, children with Duval Healthy Kids are assured high quality, consistent health care that will not only make them healthier, but allow them to focus on being children."

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Monthly premiums for children enrolled in Duval Healthy Kids range from \$10 to \$57 and will vary according to their parents' income. Historically, health coverage has been beyond reach for many of these uninsured children because their parents make too much money to qualify for Medicaid, but they cannot afford private policies. Two thousand slots are open to families who need help paying for the monthly premium. Other children can receive Duval Healthy Kids coverage at the full premium price.

"Duval Healthy Kids has had incredible community support right from the beginning," said Rose Naff, executive director of the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation. "With strong community support and additional resources, more of the 40,000 uninsured Duval County children can be covered at the subsidized premium rate."

A special group, called the Healthy Kids Consortium, was developed to bring Healthy Kids coverage to Duval County Children. The Consortium secured five percent of the money needed to start the Duval Healthy Kids program, while the state of Florida provided the bulk of the funding. In years to follow, the community will contribute a larger percentage while state funding gradually decreases.

"The health of our community's children is critical," said Dr. Jeffrey Goldhagen, chair of the Consortium and director of the Duval County Public Health Unit. "We are confident we can continue gaining support so that Duval Healthy Kids will grow and offer more uninsured children the chance to get help paying for coverage."

The Healthy Kids Consortium includes the following partners: the Duval County School Board, Duval County Public Health Unit, Jacksonville Children's Commission, Wolfson Children's Hospital, The Nemours Children's Clinic, Duval County Medical Society and United Way of Northeast Florida. The newest partners in the consortium are Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida and Baptist/St. Vincent's IDO.

Parents who want to apply for Duval Healthy Kids coverage should contact their child's school or call The Florida Healthy Kids Corporation at 1-888-352-5437.

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