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CALIFORNIA GETS FIRST "TOOLKIT" FOR EXPANDING CHILDREN'S HEALTH COVERAGE

New Report from the California Budget Project Identifies Programs and Policy Choices for Advocates, Legislators

[Sacramento] - A report released today by the California Budget Project offers the first comprehensive source of information on California's programs that provide health coverage to children. *Lasting Returns: Investing in Health Coverage for California's Children* provides policymakers and advocates with basic information to inform the emerging state and local debates over how best to expand coverage to California's million plus uninsured children. Expanding coverage for children remains high on the legislative and local agendas despite California's budgetary problems because health coverage is critical to children's educational outcomes and later economic well-being.

"Expanded health coverage will result in more children receiving the care they need in a timely fashion," said Jean Ross, Executive Director of the California Budget Project. "We have surveyed the research and policy landscape and found a consensus that providing health coverage for children now will pay great dividends for California down the road - we'll have a smarter, healthier, and more productive population."

The report notes that the state and many of its counties have already made great gains in covering children whose families lack access to or cannot afford to purchase health coverage through the private market. However, 1.1 million California children still lacked health coverage during all or part of the year in 2003. Most of these children were from working families.

Current state and local policies provide a strong foundation for extending coverage. Improved outreach and further administrative streamlining can boost enrollment among uninsured children who are eligible for health coverage through existing public programs. The report also discusses other options - some of which would require federal, state, local, or voter approval to secure more funding - as well as models from other states.

Ross notes that although California's counties have been innovative in finding ways to cover more children, they may not be able to sustain their current programs without long-term

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financial support, “Larger entities like state governments have a greater ability to pool risk and achieve economies of scale that can help save money in the long run.”

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The California Budget Project was founded in 1994 to provide Californians with a source of timely, objective, and accessible expertise on state fiscal and economic policy issues. A grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation supported the publication of Lasting Returns: Investing in Health Coverage for California’s Children. The new report is available at www.cbp.org.