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## **State groups taking up cause of children's health insurance**

*By Mollie Sheehan / Winona Daily News*

If all of Minnesota's uninsured children gathered for a Vikings game, they would fill the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome — and 20,000 would be left standing outside.

Since 2001, the number of children in the state who do not have health insurance has been climbing steadily, reaching 85,000. Other statistics tell a similar story.

The number of children living in mild to severe poverty is increasing, too — by 35 percent in the past seven years.

Three advocacy groups — Child Care WORKS, Children's Defense Fund of Minnesota and Jobs Now Coalition have joined forces and are traveling the state to gather public input.

The Working Family Initiative Forum will be held in Winona from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at St. Mary's Parish, in the Visitation Commons, 1303 W. Broadway.

Kevin Ristau of Jobs Now, said the problem — and its solution — is three-fold: the opportunity to earn a family-supporting wage and access to both affordable, quality child care and health care.

Jobs Now surveys found that the number of jobseekers in the state sharply outpaces job openings: 65,000 to 25,000. Of the 25,000 job vacancies, 73 percent require no more than a high school education and offer a median hourly pay of \$7. That's not enough to support a family or offset health and child care costs.

Ristau said the state needs to reinvest in "human infrastructure."

Marc Kimball of the Children's Defense Fund said taxpayers will be

footing the bill in one way or another, either by investing proactively or paying expensive, poverty-related consequences.

Kimball said it is more costly to leave children uninsured.

"It's like having a hole in your roof and saying you can't afford to fix it," he said. "Eventually, you'll have to pay for it. And it will cost a lot more the longer you wait."

Increased crime, remedial education and decreased future job performance result when children aren't thriving, he said.

The forum will propose solutions and will teach participants how to get involved and help create changes in Legislature.

Licensed child care providers who attend will receive training credit that is needed to maintain their licensure.

For more information, call Aloha Davis at 507-454-4252.