



State agencies and school lunch programs join together to enroll kids

From the CDF Minnesota August 2001 Newsletter

More children in Minnesota may have health insurance this fall thanks to a new pilot program called Express Lane Eligibility, which will allow the Free and Reduced School Lunch program (NSLP) to share information with the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning (CFL) and the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Sponsored by CFL, DHS, and county human service agencies, Express Lane Eligibility will kick off this fall in more than 10 school districts in Minnesota including the Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools. The way the program works is that families who apply for free or reduced lunches this fall will be able to use the NSLP application form to indicate an interest in health care coverage. If interested, families can consent to having the information on their free and reduced lunch application shared with DHS. A recently enacted federal law allows agencies to share this type of eligibility information.

School personnel will upload the NSLP application information and the names of the families who have indicated an interest in health coverage into the CFL database. Those who are not already covered by public health insurance programs will be forwarded to DHS. Using the computer data already supplied on the NSLP application, DHS will fill in the health coverage application, highlighting the information still needed and any documentation required for health coverage under the terms of MinnesotaCare, Medical Assistance or General Assistance Medical Care, and mail forms to the appropriate families. The families will be responsible for completing the health coverage application and supplying required documentation to either the county or the state. DHS and county agencies will follow up with families to see if they have received insurance coverage.

Implementing Express Lane Eligibility is another step toward coordinating and streamlining Minnesota's public health care programs. A first step came last year, when the health care application for public programs was reduced from 22 pages to four.

Governor Jesse Ventura and the Children's Defense Fund - Minnesota encouraged implementation of the Express Lane Eligibility program. Simplification of the enrollment process and coordination of programs that serve the same low-income families are two of the goals of CDF-MN's Covering Kids Project, a national initiative funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to provide

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health access to low-income uninsured children. Covering Kids connected DHS and CFL to technical assistance and data from national models demonstrating the effectiveness of collaboration between school lunch programs and public health insurance programs.

If the pilot program proves successful, Express Lane Eligibility will be expanded to additional school districts in Minnesota.

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