Arizona's uninsured children: a solution in sight

What do the following scenarios have in common? An anguished parent watching her 7-year-old daughter suffer through an asthma attack; a fourth grader going off to school with an untreated ear infection; a teenaged boy failing to qualify for his high school baseball team because he hasn't had a sports physical; a nearsighted child squinting to see the blackboard in his sixth grade class.

The common threads are that these children have no health insurance and their working parents are without the resources to buy them the medical treatment they need. *The Widening Gap*, a study published this summer by the Healthy Children Arizona Project of Children's Action Alliance, reports there are 200,000 such children in Arizona, more than 90% from working families.

"These families have to balance paying for medical treatment with other real demands on their budgets, like car payments, gas and groceries," said Dr. Mary Rimsza, a pediatrician and co-chair of the Healthy Children Arizona Project. "Sometimes, health care doesn't get the priority it needs." However, exciting new federal legislation passed this August offers a solution for these children. It is up to Arizona lawmakers to design a program.

The new federal legislation, called the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), gives states funding to create health insurance programs for children in families with incomes up to twice the federal poverty level. S-CHIP offers states tremendous flexibility in designing coverage programs. Arizona can receive almost $900 million in federal S-CHIP funding for children's health insurance over the next ten years, the ninth highest amount of any state in the nation. Steve Lynn, CAA board member and co-chair of the Healthy Children Arizona Project, calls S-CHIP "potentially, the single most important piece of federal legislation for children since Medicaid."

Eligibility rules for AHCCCS in Arizona vary by a child's age — creating confusion and logistical headaches for families who may have one child who is eligible and others who are not. Thirty-eight states have surpassed Arizona in Medicaid eligibility and 13 have created special children's health care programs — so there are many models we can learn from to expand health care coverage.

There is no guarantee, however, that Arizona will choose to participate. State participation requires that the state match every three federal dollars with one state dollar. And the state legislature and governor must agree on the structure of the program and get it approved by the federal oversight agency.

"We need to grab this opportunity," stated Lynn. "With a strong economy, a state budget surplus, and some tobacco tax dollars available for health care, we can make a dramatic and long-lasting difference in the lives of tens of thousands of children."

Governor Hull has announced her strong support for S-CHIP through an initiative called Kids Care. Her leadership will make a huge difference, not only in the political arena, but also to the tens of thousands of children of low-income working families who now have the possibility of health coverage within their reach.

For more information or a copy of *The Widening Gap*, call Kate Searle at (602) 266-0707.
1998: A year of great potential

Let’s make it happen for Arizona’s children

As we head into 1998, Arizona possesses tremendous resources to nurture our children. We have a highly educated workforce. Our economic base has become stronger and more diverse during the last decade. Our job growth is the second fastest in the nation. We have a state budget surplus of over $200 million. But Arizona’s booming economy has not brought us healthy, safe children. Scores of uninvestigated reports of child abuse and neglect have left thousands of children at unconscionable risk. Close to 200,000 children of working families have no health care coverage. Working parents in desperate need of good quality child care are unable to find and pay for that essential care. And too many struggling families are unable to find decent paying jobs, with benefits, resulting in more children being left behind. As the data in the State of Arizona’s Children 1997 show (see page 7), there have been substantial setbacks for families and children over the past six years.

It is clear that caring for our own children and reaching out to help a child in need in our own communities can both dramatically change the lives and life chances for children. It is just as clear that public effort — through state policies, partnerships and funding — is also absolutely essential if we are serious about turning these statistics around. And in this era of federal deregulation and block grants to the states, we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to make a difference.

In 1998, Children’s Action Alliance, together with thousands of Arizonans across the state, will be addressing the following five areas that, given committed public and private sector support, will help to give every Arizona child a healthy and safe start in life.

1. Abused and neglected children: The evidence tells us that we are failing to protect children. There should no longer be any question that we respond to all reports of child abuse and neglect. But our response cannot stop after investigating the report. We need to develop the policies and the funding to provide ongoing services, support, and monitoring of families. When necessary, children should be protected with stable foster and adoptive families before they lose their childhoods.

2. Children’s health care coverage: Approximately 200,000 Arizona children have no health care coverage, the fourth highest percentage of uninsured children in the country. The passage of the State Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) on the federal level provides a wonderful and unique opportunity to reduce that number dramatically. With visionary policies and adequate state matching dollars, we can use this opportunity to bring health care security to tens of thousands of Arizona children.

3. Success By 6: This legislation, passed in 1994, established three pilot programs to help struggling families better care for their children. Healthy Families, Health Start, and Family Literacy help families address immediate needs such as housing, food, and employment, and provide ongoing support to strengthen families. These programs are now reaching a limited number of families in communities throughout the state. Without legislative action, these programs will expire on June 30, 1998.

4. Child care: Access to quality and affordable child care is critical for Arizona’s families and for a healthy economy. Today, the cost of child care is prohibitive for most low-income, working families. The quality of child care is inconsistent, and there are few incentives to improve. Many families have trouble finding access to child care that fits their work schedules and their children’s needs. State leadership and resource commitments are needed to help make good quality child care available and affordable to Arizona’s families.

5. Welfare reform: Arizona’s welfare reform is far from complete. Additional legislation and administrative policy will be needed to build upon the strong components of SB 1337 passed last session, as well as to repair the weaker components. Ultimately, the success of welfare reform rests not on reduced caseloads or reduced state budgets, but on its impact on children and families. In these economic good times, we can design state policy and state budgets to help families succeed.

We can all play a part in turning these opportunities into real change for Arizona’s children. Of course we need to take care of our own children and help remake our communities so they work better for kids. But let’s remember that 1998 is an election year for our governor and all state legislators. They will be listening. Let your voice be heard. Join our fax network, write letters to the editors of newspapers, communicate with elected officials, and question candidates running for public office. Make sure they know you’re watching and that it is you, Arizona’s voters, who cast the decisive vote.

Board Profiles

Elizabeth Hernandez McNamara brings to our board an extensive health care background. She is currently Vice President of Corporate Development and Public Affairs for HealthPartners Health Plans.

Elizabeth managed Intergroup of Arizona’s operations in Phoenix from 1985 through 1995. She previously served as health care consultant and health planner for a variety of agencies in Texas and Arizona. Her breadth and depth of community involvement is impressive, including the Boards of Directors for the Arizona Town Hall, Community College of the Air Force/Air University, and Crisis Nursery. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Trinity University and her Master of Public Health degree from the University of Texas. Elizabeth’s understanding of outcome measures and her focus on accountability have helped CAA’s Fiscal Policy Advisory Committee identify critical issues and strategies.

INSIDE CAA

We are pleased to extend a warm welcome to new staff members.

Our Receptionist, Delores Belman, comes to us from Child Care Administration at the Department of Economic Security where she recently completed an internship.

Sandia Leffler joins us as Administrative Assistant. A graduate of University of Kansas receiving a BA in African/African American Studies, Sandia brings with her valuable experience as a Fulbright-Hays Scholar studying at Bayero University in Kano, Nigeria.

Bruce Liggett comes to Children’s Action Alliance as Senior Program Associate for Success By 6, bringing seventeen years of administrative and policy development experience with the Department of Economic Security, including nearly a decade of specialized experience in child care policy management and administration.

Paula Wright joins Children’s Action Alliance as a Program Associate for Child Welfare. Paula’s six years of experience in social work and legal experience with ComCare, and corporate paralegal experience with St. Joseph’s Hospital, will help Children’s Action Alliance meet the challenges in child welfare policy.

Fond Farewells

Children’s Action Alliance bids a fond farewell to Irene Jacobs, Shelly Knight and Gifford Lada. After nearly eight years of dedicated service to Children’s Action Alliance, they have moved on to new opportunities and a new job as Executive Director of The Emily Center at Phoenix Children’s Hospital.

Shelly left Children’s Action Alliance this spring to spend more time with her family. Next month, Giff will leave us to take the position of Executive Director for Pediatrics at Mercy Healthcare Arizona.

We wish them the best of luck in their new endeavors. We would also like to express our appreciation to Kim Schammel who recently completed an internship with us through the Arizona State University Department of Family Resources and Human Development.
Baby to 3 on TV in Southern Arizona

Recent research on brain development confirms that children's experiences in their earliest years have lifelong impacts. Parents want to know what this means for their own families. CAA is working to answer their questions.

In a partnership with KVOA-TV news, Channel 4, in Tucson, Success By Six Southern Arizona is preparing a public information campaign designed to help parents know what very young children need to grow up healthy and ready to learn. The first three-part series focuses on young children's physical development and the second series focuses on cognitive development.

Because parents, alone, cannot create the nurturing environment children need, the final segment will focus on what our communities can do together. Experts in a wide range of children's issues will explore the types of policies, partnerships, and community supports that parents and children need to succeed.

We will also have a Baby to 3 pamphlet available next spring for parents who want to know more about what children need. The information will be designed to help parents better care for their own children and to point the way for parents to become advocates for more child-friendly communities.

For more information on Baby to 3, please call Penelope Jacks at (520) 795-4199.

Welfare Reform: A Work In Progress

Arizona's welfare reform is far from complete. All over Arizona, in a variety of arenas, people are working to build on the foundation laid in last year's welfare legislation. The message is clear: welfare reform is a work in progress and our time and creativity now can make a positive difference for some of the poorest, most vulnerable families in our communities.

Legislative Process Continuing

Arizona's welfare law established several groups to look at the impact of welfare reform. A Procurement Board was appointed by former Governor Symington to design a contract and select a private vendor to run a privatized pilot welfare program (A2 Works) in part of Maricopa County. They have been meeting long hours exploring critical and basic questions such as how will child care be provided, what performance incentives will the private vendor receive, and how much will the vendor be paid. The Board has requested that the legislature and the governor enact legislation to clarify and strengthen the welfare law before they ask private vendors to bid on a contract.

A Task Force, created by the legislature, is developing recommendations to improve our welfare law. There are four working groups focusing on specific issues: child care and transportation, rural/ Native American and safety net issues, workplace issues, and fiscal impacts and privatization.

Community Process Continuing

The Arizona Network for Community Responsibility (ANCRI), a group of community leaders concerned about welfare reform issues, staffed by CAA, held an all-day workshop in September: How Will Welfare Work? Over 200 people attended to learn more about the federal and state laws and to explore how community efforts can make a difference.

The presentations, from a wide variety of perspectives, emphasized that Arizona still has many options and that altogether we can make welfare reform work better. Cindy Mann, the Director of the State Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Project at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in Washington DC, outlined the possibilities available under the federal law. She described the innovative designs some states are crafting to help families get the supports they need to get and keep jobs that pay a family wage. Ideas included expanding health care coverage for working low-income families, funding child care adequately, and separating state dollars from federal dollars to help more families without federal restrictions.

Panelists and participants discussed specific steps that local governments, charities, faith communities, and businesses can take to help welfare reform succeed. Suggestions included: strengthening religious congregations' social action committees; serving mothers receiving welfare in congregational child care centers; improving human services networking through automation; and collecting client data to examine the impact of welfare reform.

What's Left

The impact of welfare reform is beginning to hit. The Department of Economic Security is placing TANF recipients in volunteer community service positions, job readiness classes, and unpaid work experience internships to meet the federal work participation requirements. DES is also working to help recipients find paid employment and, with the strong economy, TANF rolls have continued to drop—falling over 17% between July 1996 and July 1997. But we certainly can't call welfare reform a success. This November, thousands of families lost welfare benefits as they faced time limits or sanctions. And without any data yet, we have no way to know what is happening to parents and children once they leave the welfare rolls—regardless of whether they leave because of a job or because of time limits.

Three broad challenges remain:

- to reach and help families before they hit time limits or sanctions,
- to use federal, state, and private resources creatively and efficiently to help families succeed once they leave the welfare rolls,
- to carefully monitor the impacts of welfare reform on both parents and children.

After all, more than two-thirds of the welfare caseload in Arizona are children and they are our next generation of employers, employees, and parents.

If you want to participate in the Arizona Network for Community Responsibility, please call Elizabeth Hudgins at (602) 206-0707.

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MORE MONEY FOR CHILD CARE

As we happily reported in the last issue of our newsletter, the State Legislature allocated an additional $20 million to help low-income families afford child care. This August, the money "hit the streets." Now, working low-income parents can qualify for the same subsidy rate as families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits. The subsidy is also available for families in homeless or domestic violence shelters. If you or someone you know needs help paying for child care, call your local DES office to see if you might qualify for the new, higher rate.

Children's Action Alliance is grateful to the following foundations and corporations who make our work possible:

America West Airlines
Arizona Community Foundation
Arizona Public Service
The Arizona Republic Season for Sharing
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Bank One, Arizona
The Casey Family Program
The Ford Foundation
Honeywell Inc.
Margaret T. Morris Foundation
The Robidoux Foundation
The Schoolhouse Foundation
Share Our Strength (SOS)
The Steele Foundation, Inc.
St. Luke's Charitable Health Trust

Panelists: Alvin Washington, Human Services Director for the City of Phoenix; Tim Ladwig, Senior Vice President of the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Azeda Dure, Pastor of Christ's Ring Lutheran Church, share their views about what is needed to make welfare reform work at the Arizona Network for Community Responsibility Workshop September 22.
1998 Pivotal Legislative Session for Arizona Child and Family Stability Act Programs

In 1994, in the first-ever special session devoted to children's issues, state lawmakers passed the Arizona Child and Family Stability Act, known more commonly as Success By 6. The legislation expanded three small programs that had shown early promise:

- **Health Start** provides health education and support to pregnant women, through community health centers, private agencies and private health departments. It grew from 400 participating families to over 3,200. Evaluations have indicated an increase in prenatal care, a decrease in pre-term and low birthweight babies, and increased immunization rates—all important links with family stability.

- **Healthy Families** provides family support services and parenting skills through private agencies, county health departments and medical centers to families at high risk of abusing or neglecting their children. It grew from 130 participating families to almost 2,000. Evaluations found improvements in family stability among these families.

- **Family Literacy** increases a focus on learning for parents and their preschool children. Through community colleges, school districts and adult education centers, it served 259 families. Evaluations have shown improvements in children's educational success, comprehension and language, as well as an increased time spent between parents and their children.

Three programs target young children, focusing on strengthening the whole family and giving families the opportunity for ongoing participation—three key factors that help struggling families achieve long-term success. With state funding for these three pilot programs, Arizona has been a national leader in building a foundation for enhanced family stability. Without legislative action in 1998, however, the pilot programs will disappear and that foundation could be lost. Children's Action Alliance, together with hundreds of Arizonans across the state, is working with legislators to appropriate $5.4 million for the continuation of these programs as ongoing tools for family support. For more information on the Success By 6 programs, please call Bruce Liggett at (602) 266-0707.

Protecting abused and neglected children: Arizonans propose solutions

Children's Action Alliance and AZ for Kids just completed a series of four community forums around Arizona about child abuse and neglect. Children Are Listening... Conversations for Their Future brought together Arizona citizens from a range of backgrounds and opinions, to share their ideas, concerns and, most importantly, solutions about how to help abused, neglected and abandoned children and their families.

The forums, held in Tucson, Prescott, East Valley/Metro Phoenix and West Valley/Metro Phoenix, prompted a great deal of community problem-solving. Panelists heard from foster parents, adoptive parents, juvenile court judges, attorneys, physicians, police officers, representatives from community agencies, and staff of government agencies offering a wide variety of ideas and suggestions.

These solutions provide a critical component in the development of a comprehensive model for change to help give every Arizona child a safe and permanent home. CAA will continue working with parents, businesses, religious and neighborhood organizations and legislators to improve the ways we help vulnerable children and families. If you would like to be a voice for abused, neglected and abandoned children, call Paula Wright at (602) 266-0707 and ask to join AZ for Kids.

Barbara Anderson provides a personal perspective on the challenges facing foster parents in Arizona at Children are Listening... Conversations for Their Future in Tucson.

The State of Arizona's Children 1997 profiles progress and setbacks in every county

This new Children's Action Alliance report is the fourth comprehensive look at the status of children and families in Arizona. The report compiles and evaluates the most recent and accurate data that reflect threats to child well-being in our state. Using charts, graphs, and narrative, we examine trends in key risk indicators between 1990 and 1996, including poverty, early care and education, child health and safety, teens at risk, juvenile crime, and child abuse and neglect. The report also includes easy-to-read profiles of the condition of children in each county. A special section explores how Arizona children could be affected by welfare reform.

Statewide trends from 1990 to 1996

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changed for the Better</th>
<th>Rate Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Preschool (1991-97)</td>
<td>65.8% better</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prenatal Care</td>
<td>32.6% better</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infant Deaths</td>
<td>11.3% better</td>
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<tr>
<td>Juvenile Arrests for Violent Crime</td>
<td>5.4% better</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Drop-outs (1993-95)</td>
<td>2.2% better</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Births to Teens</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Health Care Coverage (1989-97)</td>
<td>9.4% worse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children in Foster Care (1991-97)</td>
<td>25.0% worse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children Approved for Free and Reduced Price School Lunches (1990-97)</td>
<td>27.4% worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun-related Deaths</td>
<td>67.8% worse</td>
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State of Arizona's Children 1997 Order Form

YES! I want to know more about the health, safety and economic security of kids in Arizona. Please send me copies of State of Arizona's Children 1997

Single copies: $10 each
10 or more copies: $8 each

Name:

Organization:

Address:

City/State/Zip:

Daytime Phone:

Please mail form and payment to: Children's Action Alliance 4001 North Third Street, Suite 160 Phoenix, Arizona 85012

Thank you.

Barbara Anderson provides a personal perspective on the challenges facing foster parents in Arizona at Children are Listening... Conversations for Their Future in Tucson.

The data illustrate a mixture of positive and negative trends. There has been progress; there have also been some serious setbacks. Yet, there is hope. In this era of federal deregulation and lockstep grants to states, Arizona has both the opportunity and the responsibility to cope with the gap in children's health care coverage, the tragedies of child abuse and neglect, and the struggles of parents without job skills. With determination and understanding, businesses, charities, and government can together improve the lives and life chances for hundreds of thousands of Arizona's children.

Barbara Anderson provides a personal perspective on the challenges facing foster parents in Arizona at Children are Listening... Conversations for Their Future in Tucson.

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Stay in touch with CAA

- In the spirit of the season, we hope you will remember Children’s Action Alliance. With your help, we will continue to make a difference in the lives of Arizona’s children and their families. For your convenience, CAA now accepts Visa and MasterCard. You can make your donation this holiday season by calling (602) 266-0707. We appreciate your support.

- At any time of the day or night, please call Children’s Action Alliance to sign up for our fax and e-mail network or to get updates on upcoming CAA events and legislative alerts. Just call (602) 266-0707 and dial or ask for line 4 for legislative updates or line 3 for upcoming events.