

## THE HIGHLIGHTS:

# EFFECTIVE MESSAGES TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN HEALTH REFORM



FIRST FOCUS  
MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

The following messages convey the importance of protecting children in health reform. Use them in speeches, OpEds, Letters to the Editor, action alerts, letters to Members of Congress, and anywhere else where a longer argument will prove persuasive:

### Talk about preventative costs.

“We all win when children get the care they need. When an asthmatic child can get regular treatment, she is less likely to need emergency room care for an attack. That helps to keep her in school and her parents at work, and it helps taxpayers avoid the high cost of emergency care. The health and care of infants and children have a direct impact on future health care costs. The costs of prevention are far lower than the costs of illnesses.”

“As a country we should be doing everything to ensure that we have the healthiest children in the world. All American children need access to comprehensive services so that they get the best health care coverage regardless of whether they get it through Medicaid, CHIP or a private health insurance provider. Preventative health care efforts now will save money in the long run and help make sure our kids grow up to be healthy adults.”

### Use the economy.

“There are still many children whose parents cannot afford health insurance, and this has only been made worse during the current economy. In a recent survey, one in ten parents – and one in five low income parents – reported having delayed taking their children for a routine medical check-up, to the dentist, or delayed taking a child to a medical specialist for a specific treatment because of the recession. Uninsured low income children are also four times as likely to rely on an emergency department or have no regular source of care.”

### Emphasize that children have unique health care needs.

“Children face unique health issues and can't be treated as “little adults” in the health care community. All children should have the comprehensive benefits and child-focused coverage standards available through Medicaid. Both public and private insurance options should promote the coverage features that matter most for children: access to primary and specialty care, high quality care, dependable care that can be counted on, and fair payments that let families actually use the coverage they have.”

### Stress working families

“Too many working families cannot afford health insurance for their children. Even when both parents work, the high costs of health care are often too much for families struggling to pay for other basic expenses, like food and rent. Protecting public health insurance for children is critical to helping working families and keeping children healthy.”

### STATEMENTS THAT MAKE THE CASE:

**The most effective statements around children's health care emphasize that every child deserves quality health care and that every child has a right to quality care.**

- ✓ Every child deserves quality health care coverage
- ✓ Every child has the right to quality health care coverage

#### Other top-tier statements include:

- ✓ Children are not little adults and they have their own unique health care needs
- ✓ Children have their own unique health care needs that must be specifically addressed
- ✓ All children should be provided comprehensive, age-appropriate health insurance
- ✓ We have a moral obligation to ensure all children get the health care they need
- ✓ We have a responsibility to ensure all children get the health care they need

**In a second tier, though still highly effective, are messages that emphasize health care for children as a long-term investment**

- ✓ Investments in health care now reap benefits that will last a lifetime
- ✓ Providing more children with health care coverage will create overall cost savings in the health care system

**Other second-tier statements stress universal coverage that meets children's health needs:**

- ✓ All children should be provided health insurance that covers them from head to toe
- ✓ A national health insurance program should cover all children (or, A national health insurance program should cover all children, including legal immigrant children)

## A Message to Address Coverage for Legal Immigrant Children.

“America has always been a nation where children can get health care regardless of where their parents were born. As long as immigrants pay their fair share for health care, their children deserve the same affordable health care as other children. All children deserve an opportunity to become healthy, productive citizens.”

### MESSAGING TIPS:

✓ **Remind individuals that children need access to comprehensive health care services:**

All children today need access to comprehensive health care services. Together, Medicaid and CHIP have helped millions of children get this care. We still have a ways to go and should be working to maintain this forward momentum in covering children and providing them with all the services they need.

✓ **Connect children’s health care to success in school and life:**

Investing in children’s health care puts our nation’s young people on the path to success in school and later in life.

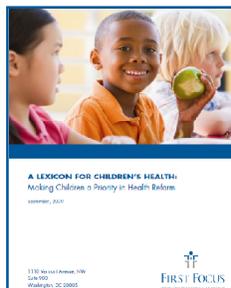
✓ **Point out the facts:**

Studies have shown that children's health status when beginning school predicted third grade achievement scores: children in poor general health had significantly lower achievement scores than children in good general health. The earlier we can close the achievement gap among students, the more successful and healthy the next generation will be in the future.

✓ **When talking about health reform, the voters understand that we must ensure children are not left worse off:**

All children should have comprehensive benefits and child-focused coverage. We have come very far for children over the past quarter century, helping cover millions of American children. Health reform now offers an opportunity to finish the job for our kids, but the first challenge is to ensure that children are not worse off under a reform plan than they are today. For children, health reform must follow one simple principle: Fix what’s broken and build on what works.

✓ **Avoid the “one size does not fit all” analogy, as voters and focus group participants found this message less powerful and less effective.**



For more effective messages and communications tips, please review First Focus’s publication, “A Lexicon for Children’s Health: Making Children a Priority in Health Reform.” This publication can be downloaded at [www.firstfocus.net/pages/3637](http://www.firstfocus.net/pages/3637).



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First Focus is a bipartisan advocacy organization that is committed to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions.