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on the beat

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Coalition aims to cover more kids

HEALTH

WARREN WOLFE



While the health care bill signed recently by President Obama will whittle down the number of uninsured Americans in coming years, a Minnesota coalition is jumping in now to help families get coverage for many of the 88,000 or so children who lack insurance.

Thousands of those children are eligible for subsidized coverage now, but are not enrolled.

With a \$988,000 two-year federal grant, the coalition has set up a website, HealthyKidsMN.org, and a program with counselors to help families figure out if they or their children qualify for public coverage. They'll also help families complete the application paperwork.

"We know that healthy kids do better in school and likely will do better in life," said Debra Holmgren, who heads one of four coalition partners, Portico Healthnet of St. Paul. That also helps taxpayers, who end up spending less on remedial education, poverty programs and prisons, she said.

Public service announcements will begin soon in English, Spanish and Somali.

About 60,000 of the uninsured kids probably qualify right now for Medicaid, called Medical Assistance in Minnesota, or MinnesotaCare, a program for low-income working families.

"Many families think that because they have jobs they don't qualify for help," Holmgren said. "Actually, many of them do." In some cases, parents won't qualify but their kids will, she said.

Portico will help people in the metro area and many rural counties. Its partners are Generations Health Care Initiatives in Duluth, working with Lake Superior Health Center; Olmsted County Community Action Partnership in Rochester, with Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association, and St. Cloud Area Legal Services.

For help: call Portico at 1-866-489-4899; Generations Health Care in Duluth at 218-722-9650; Intercultural Assistance in Rochester at 507-289-5960 ext. 121; or St. Cloud Legal Services at 1-888-360-2889.

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