



**Memorandum in Support  
Immigration Children's Health Improvement Act (ICHIA)**

The Children's Health Fund supports S.1104, the Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act (ICHIA), which would give states the option of providing health coverage under Medicaid to pregnant women who are lawfully present in the U.S., and to children under either Medicaid or SCHIP, without imposing a five-year waiting period. Medicaid and SCHIP eligibility restrictions for non-citizens have limited immigrant children's access to health care. Current law requires immigrants to have resided in the United States for at least five years before they can become eligible for Medicaid and SCHIP. As a result, foreign-born children receive inferior health care and are also more likely to be in poor or fair health.

For foreign-born children living in low-income immigrant families, the picture is even bleaker. Fifty-one percent of non-citizen children living in low-income families are uninsured. Families in this situation have little options and often rely on emergency rooms for primary and preventive care. As fellow tax payers, immigrants should be entitled to receive the same health benefits under Medicaid and SCHIP as citizens.

As of May 2004, 21 states provided some type of medical coverage to immigrants who are barred from receiving Medicaid or SCHIP. Currently, states that opt to provide coverage to legal immigrants must do so without federal assistance. For states that have an overwhelmingly large percentage of immigrants, this cost can be crippling but necessary to ensure the health and well being of children. ICHIA would provide much needed fiscal relief to these states.

The Children's Health Fund National Network serves medically underserved populations in rural and urban locations, many of whom are immigrants. CHF believes that every child deserves a medical home: health care that is accessible, continuous, comprehensive, family centered, coordinated, compassionate and culturally effective. Health coverage is the first step to achieving a medical home.

*The Children's Health Fund (CHF), working with hospitals and health centers throughout the country, has provided comprehensive pediatric care to more than 300,000 medically underserved children since its inception in 1987. By providing a medical home to thousands of children through 17 programs in 13 states and the District of Columbia, CHF recognizes the importance of public health insurance programs to ensure continuity of care, the continuation of a child's access to a medical home.*