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Annual Celebration of Children's Health Luncheon: Celebrating 20 Years of RItE Care

U.S. Senator Whitehouse, U.S. Representative Langevin, U.S. Representative Cicilline, Lt. Governor Roberts, and other elected officials and community leaders to attend event

Event marks 20th anniversary of RItE Care health insurance program and its positive health outcomes for children and families

Providence, RI (November 24, 2014) – More than 180 community leaders, elected officials, and health care experts gathered for the fourteenth annual *Celebration of Children's Health Luncheon* to reflect on the progress that Rhode Island has made in achieving positive health outcomes for children. This event also celebrated the twentieth anniversary of RItE Care, Rhode Island's health insurance program for children and families with low and moderate incomes.

Covering Kids Awards were presented to elected officials and community partners for their contributions to increasing access to health insurance coverage and health care for children, including U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, U.S. Representative James Langevin, U.S. Representative David Cicilline, Lieutenant Governor Elizabeth Roberts, House Speaker Nicholas Mattiello, Senate President Teresa Paiva Weed, Representative Joseph McNamara, Representative Deborah Ruggiero, Senator Juan Pichardo, and Senator Gayle Goldin. U.S. Senator Jack Reed gave remarks via video.

Linda Katz, Co-Founder and Policy Director of the Economic Progress Institute; Marti Rosenberg, Program Director at the Providence Plan; and Tricia Leddy, recently retired from three decades of state service at DHS, EOHHS, and HealthSource RI were this year's community leaders honored with *Covering Kids Awards* for their longstanding commitment to children's health coverage.

The *Celebration of Children's Health Luncheon* highlights the importance of comprehensive health coverage in achieving positive health outcomes for Rhode Island children. With 94.6% of children covered, Rhode Island ranks 16th in the nation for children's health insurance coverage. Of the children who had health insurance in Rhode Island in 2013, 53.4% received coverage through their parents' employer-sponsored health plan, 32.8% were covered exclusively by Medicaid/RItE Care, 13.8% had either another type of coverage or combination of coverage, and 5.4% (12,000 children) were uninsured.

In the mid-2000s, Rhode Island was one of the top states for children's health coverage. A new national report (*Children's Coverage at a Crossroads*, released by the Center for Children and Families at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute) found that Rhode Island was one of only three states in the U.S. that showed an increase in the rate of uninsured children between 2011 and 2013.

This increase, coupled with significant progress made by other states in covering kids, has meant that Rhode Island has not kept pace and its national ranking has slipped.

“For two decades, Rhode Island has been a leader in making sure that our most vulnerable children and families have access to high-quality health care,” stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “We have long been proud of the RIte Care program and the wise investments, outreach efforts, and quality standards that have contributed to its success. Right now, we are at a critical juncture in terms of our commitment to the health of our most vulnerable children and families. Other states are finding ways to finish the job and cover all of their kids. We need to make sure that our long-standing commitment to children’s health coverage does not erode and that we reinvigorate our work to achieve our shared goal of all children in Rhode Island being covered. Comprehensive children’s health coverage is the cornerstone of overall health and well-being.”

At today’s *Celebration of Children’s Health Luncheon*, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released a new report – *RIte Care Results* – which documents ways that RIte Care has improved the health of children, pregnant women, and parents, including:

- **Children with RIte Care have fewer preventable hospitalizations than uninsured children.** The percentage of preventable hospitalizations for children who were uninsured in Rhode Island has more than doubled between 2001 and 2012 (from 7% to 16%), while preventable hospitalizations for children with RIte Care coverage decreased by one-third, from 12% to 8%.
- **Children and adults under age 65 with Medicaid coverage have the lowest percentage of emergency admissions to the hospital.** Thirty-eight percent of admissions to the hospital for Medicaid members are emergencies, compared with 39% among those privately insured and 81% for the uninsured.
- **Healthier pregnancies and healthier babies.** Fewer women with RIte Care coverage smoke during pregnancy, which can increase the likelihood of poor birth outcomes. The percentage of women enrolled in RIte Care who smoked while pregnant fell by more than one-half between 1994 and 2012, from 32% to 13%. The infant mortality rate also dropped from 7.2 infant deaths per 1,000 births in 1994 to 6.7 in 2012.

“Outcome data continue to show that RIte Care leads to better health outcomes for children, pregnant women, and parents,” stated Bryant. “We now have 20 years of evidence proving that RIte Care is a wise investment for our state and for families. As we look toward the future, we must preserve and build upon RIte Care’s success to ensure that all Rhode Island children have the comprehensive health care they need to grow up strong and healthy.”

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education, and development of Rhode Island children.