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Legislation to Help Insure More Oklahomans

OKLAHOMA CITY – Two bills passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor are giant steps in the Governor’s Insure Oklahoma initiative to help provide access to health insurance to employees of small businesses and children across the state, the Oklahoma Health Care Authority (OHCA) said.

Lawmakers have approved the All Kids Act, which will help purchase health insurance for children in families with incomes between 185 percent and 300 percent of the federal poverty level. They also opted to increase eligibility for the Oklahoma Employer/employee Partnership for Insurance Coverage (O-EPIC) to allow state employers with 250 or fewer employees and workers earning up to 250 percent of the poverty level to get state assistance in paying health insurance premiums.

The OHCA now will submit a request to the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for its approval of these changes. It may require about six months to a year before CMS grants approval and the programs can begin.

In the meantime, OHCA staff members will be working out the details of the programs so they can be implemented when the state gets federal approval.

“The passage of these two bills has pushed Oklahoma to the forefront of states that are creating better access to quality health care by helping people buy insurance for their families,” said Mike Fogarty, OHCA’s chief executive officer.

The All Kids Act will allow the families of more than 40,000 uninsured children to access private insurance or employer-sponsored insurance for dependent children through a voucher and/or subsidy program. The proposal also establishes a program for partial coverage for children and families in high

deductible or limited benefit health insurance plans and provides for cost sharing requirements on a sliding scale.

O-EPIC is an innovative program Oklahoma has created to bridge the gap in health care coverage for low-income working adults. Oklahoma has one of the highest uninsured rates in the country; 42 percent of businesses with fewer than 50 employees and 17 percent with 50-249 employees do not offer health insurance coverage.

Under O-EPIC's employer-sponsored insurance program, premium costs are shared by the state (60 percent), the employer (25 percent) and the employee (15 percent). O-EPIC's Individual Plan allows people who can't access O-EPIC through their employer, including those who are self-employed or may be temporarily unemployed, to buy health insurance directly through the state. The premiums are based on a sliding scale depending on the person's income.

Both programs will be funded through tobacco tax revenues plus federal matching funds.

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