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HHS APPROVES MINNESOTA PLAN TO EXPAND SERVICES TO 18,000 CHILDREN Changes in SCHIP Program Will Provide Services To Homeless Children And Others

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson today announced the approval of Minnesota's request to provide mental health screenings and other services to about 18,000 low-income children who otherwise may not be eligible for coverage under its State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

The changes, called a health services initiative, will include mental health screenings of children in the court system, outreach and mental health screenings for homeless children, comprehensive services for children with special health care needs and family planning services. Minnesota will use grants paid to providers to fund these programs.

"Minnesota is using the flexibility in the law to meet the diverse health and support services needs of Minnesota's most vulnerable children," Secretary Thompson said. "This initiative will improve the lives of children who otherwise might not receive critical support services."

As a part of this initiative, Minnesota will provide funding to local service agencies to reach out to homeless children and provide health-screening services to them. By targeting homeless children and identifying potential needs for mental health services, the social service agencies will be able to make referrals for services on behalf of the homeless children. The goals of the project are to improve mental health and functioning in children, expedite the process for obtaining necessary mental health services, and integrate the screening services with the spectrum of supportive services for families and children.

With these changes, Minnesota expects to reach about 18,000 children under age 19 who may not otherwise have access to the services offered under the health services initiative.

Minnesota is the first state to provide such services through a health services initiative, which allows states to use money available for administrative expenses to improve the health of low-income children -- including some who would not otherwise receive SCHIP benefits.

"We encourage states to use this option to further protect public health and improve their capacity to deliver public health services," said Tom Scully, the administrator of HHS' Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the federal agency that oversees the SCHIP program.

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at www.hhs.gov/news.