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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

*For more information contact:  
Ruth Ehresman 314-504-3616 or  
Amy Blouin 314-518-8867 or  
Lise Bernstein 314-542-2269*

**Proposed HealthNet Program  
Provides “Mixed-Bag” for Medicaid Reform**

Missouri HealthNet, the proposed replacement for the state’s Medicaid health insurance program, includes several positive features but also has “red flags” that could reduce access to health care for low-income Missourians, according to the Missouri Budget Project (MBP), a fiscal analysis organization.

The recommendations released on December 7 by the departments of Health and Senior Services, Social Services and Mental Health are being considered by Governor Matt Blunt. The current Medicaid program is slated to end by June 2008.

“Access to health care is a priority issue for Missourians. We encourage people to become informed about the proposed new HealthNet program and let their elected representatives know what’s important to them,” says Amy Blouin, MBP executive director. The Missouri legislature will be addressing the program to replace Medicaid during the session which begins January 3.

Among the positive recommendations for HealthNet are: reduced affordability tests for the State Children’s Health Insurance Program; health care professionals using

“evidence-based” best practices; creation of a transitional program for children who become ineligible for foster care due to their age; and encouragement for the state to pass legislation to more effectively prosecute Medicaid provider fraud.

“We have some concerns about the HealthNet proposal,” says Ruth Ehresman, MBP director of budgetary and health policy. “It doesn’t restore eligibility for the more than 100,000 Missourians who lost their Medicaid insurance due to cuts made by the Legislature. Missourians living far below the Federal poverty level will remain ineligible for Medicaid.”

“Another caution is the so-called ‘reward’ system that would make access to services such as dental care available only to those who demonstrate healthy behaviors. Such barriers to basic, preventive health care should not be imposed on people who are coping with chronic health conditions beyond their control,” Blouin says.

“We see many opportunities to improve Missouri’s health insurance program that increase access to health care, particularly with an emphasis on prevention and wellness,” Blouin says. “The 2007 legislative session holds great potential to enact public policy that moves Missouri in a healthy direction.”

“We urge the Governor and legislators to act cautiously and thoughtfully,” adds Ehresman. “And we look forward to dialogue involving all stakeholders before plans are finalized.”

In a recently-published report, the MBP outlines guiding principles for Medicaid and healthcare reform. The report: “Clock Ticks on Medicaid: Reform Must First Do No Harm” is available at [www.mobudget.org](http://www.mobudget.org)

*The Missouri Budget Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit fiscal analysis organization that provides timely information on the state's budget, tax and fiscal policies...and their impact on moderate and low-income Missourians.*