

**May 18 2007**

For more information contact The Missouri Budget Project:  
Amy Blouin, Executive Director, 314-518-8867  
Ruth Ehresman, Director of Budgetary & Health Policy, 314-504-3616  
Lise Bernstein, Communications Director, 314-239-6366

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Missouri Legislature Passes MO HealthNet;  
Falls Short of Medicaid Reform**

*New Program Fails to Restore Health Care Access  
to Lowest-Income Missourians*

**May 18-2007**--MO HealthNet (Senate Bill 577) which was approved by the Missouri Legislature today makes some positive changes but falls well short of health care reform, according to the Missouri Budget Project, a fiscal analysis organization.

“Today Missouri made some initial steps on the road to health care reform. We have completed the first mile in the marathon, but there’s a long way to go before we pass the finish line,” said Amy Blouin, Missouri Budget Project executive director.

“MO HealthNet doesn’t restore health care to the more than 100,000 lowest-income Missourians who were cut from the state’s insurance program in 2005. Nor does it address the needs of the one in eight Missourians who are uninsured,” Blouin said.

“Missourians may be left with the mistaken impression that Medicaid has been fixed,” said Ruth Ehresman, MBP’s director of budgetary and health policy. “Missouri’s working parents are no better off today than they were yesterday. A single parent with two children still does not qualify for the new MO HealthNet program if he or she has income over \$3,600 per year,” Ehresman said.

“MO HealthNet does not help the elderly or people with disabilities who must spend themselves into deep poverty before they become eligible for the state health insurance program,” Ehresman said.

MO HealthNet includes some improvements in health care access, but leaves much discretion to an oversight committee and the Department of Social Services to implement the changes. The positive changes include:

- Restoring health coverage to about 3,000 workers with disabilities under the “Ticket-to-Work” program. In 2005, about 18,000 Missourians were cut from the program.
- Changes to the Children’s Health Insurance Program that would restore coverage to about 7,000 low-income children.
- Providing an estimated 90,000 low-income women with reproductive health services including annual pap smears, cervical and breast cancer screening.
- Protecting "optional" services for pregnant women, blind adults and children. These include dental, vision and other services.

MO HealthNet also will increase the reimbursement to health care providers. “This is a much-needed improvement which should result in more physicians to provide care to low-income patients,” Ehresman said.

Another positive aspect of MO HealthNet is how managed care will be used. “People who are blind and those disabilities as well as the elderly will not be required to be enrolled in managed care plans which could have restricted their health services. Everyone in MO HealthNet will participate in a coordinated care plan,” Ehresman said.

*The Missouri Budget Project is a fiscal analysis organization that informs the public about the state’s budgetary and tax policy options and their impact on moderate and low-income Missourians.*