

Working with and Selecting Families to Speak with the Media

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Enrolling children in low-cost or free health care coverage programs can really change a family's life. Sharing a family's story about their positive experience with Medicaid or SCHIP is a powerful way to add a human face to the issue and attract both the media and potentially eligible families to your event.

Suggestions for places to find a family include community-based organizations serving and enrolling families, hospital social workers, community clinics and state primary care associations.

Things to remember when looking for a family:

- **Consider if the story is a good one to use in the media.** Will this story compel other families to enroll their uninsured children? If the family had a negative experience with the program, this may not be the appropriate family to highlight.
- **Prepare yourself emotionally.** Talking with these families can be an emotional experience when discussing concerns about the health and safety of their children. Also, remember to be sensitive to the family's emotions.
- **Convey your appreciation** of the family's willingness to speak with you. Also, make sure that they are comfortable with taking your call at home or work. **Remember, the issue is personal, so sensitivity is of the utmost importance.**

During your initial discussion with a family, be careful not to mention specific activities in which they might be asked to participate. Rather, you should explain in general that you are looking for individuals to share their stories in a variety of ways, such as being quoted in a press release, conducting a phone interview with the media, speaking at a press conference, attending a press conference to be available for post-event interviews, having their story posted on your Web site, etc.

For a list of questions that can help guide a conversation with an enrolled family, see the accompanying document, **Questions for Potential Participating Families**.

Questions to ask yourself when deciding whether a family is right for your event or other media outreach:

- Is theirs a strong, motivating story?
- Are there any negative aspects to their story (e.g., a difficult Medicaid or SCHIP enrollment experience, trouble accessing care, etc.) that could come out if questioned?
- Would the parent be an articulate spokesperson?

If you are not certain about whether to use the family, explain to them that you are speaking with several families, and that you will get back to them after you have spoken with the others. Make your decision promptly and call them back within a day or two.

You may have to talk with several families before finding a story that is appropriate for your event. Be sure to give yourself ample time prior to your event to talk with many families to ensure that you have selected the right family story.

Once you have decided on a good family to feature, explain to them what your event will entail and how they would fit in. Do not promise them that they will speak at the event. Ask if they would be comfortable telling their story in public should they be selected. Once you have selected a family, offer to help them translate their story into remarks and assist them in preparing to deliver them. Clarify that there is potential for media coverage and that you will ask them to sign a personal release that allows you to use their story again.

You may also want to consider compensating a family for their time, especially if attending the news conference will involve missing work. You also should compensate them for transportation to the event or parking fees, as well as babysitting fees if appropriate.

Prior to the event, you will want to schedule about two hours for speaker preparation. During that time, you will want the family to rehearse the remarks you have written and prepare them for possible questions with suitable answers. If possible, videotape the session to help prepare them. Ask the speaker to share the story as if they are encouraging a friend to enroll. Lastly, assure the family that you will be at the event and that all will go well.