

# News from Maternal and Child Health Access



## DARING TO HOPE

*"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter..."*  
– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

This presidential election was by far the most exciting and important political event of our lifetime. As we watched the election returns and the victory celebration at Grant Park, my daughter asked, "Mom, Dad are you crying?" And of course we were. The flood of emotions we felt and that were felt by millions of people at the park and across the country spoke to years of struggle for civil rights and the profound sense that a new day is at hand.

At the same time, we are experiencing the deepest financial crisis since the 1930s, with high unemployment that is expected to grow, lower property values, and lower tax revenues. States have been hit hard and counties even harder. Los Angeles has the highest number of people on General Relief since 1998. These are people who so need assistance they will take the time and trouble to apply for \$221 a month. Even more astounding is the growth in the number of people receiving food stamps – from 26,000 swelling to 296,000 in the last year, according to the *LA Times*. MCH Access has always helped people with these applications but just received a Department of Agriculture grant to do this work officially.

Of course in hard times, more people turn to public assistance, and thankfully, at least children's health coverage exists. Currently, in most of Los Angeles County, children up to 300% of poverty can enroll in free or low-cost health insurance. But that might not be the case for long. Governor Schwarzenegger, while noting for the first time that we must increase revenues, has also proposed sharp cuts in health and welfare programs, ignoring the disproportionate cuts these programs have absorbed over the past decade. Wait lists and bureaucratic measures are proposed that will have the effect of

kicking off hundreds of thousands of children from health coverage in the next couple years.



Proposals for adults may be worse: Parents in the largest Medi-Cal program would be allowed annual income of just \$14,000 for a family of four. Legal permanent residents would be relegated to emergency services only and denied comprehensive preventive, chronic and acute care that keeps folks out of emergency rooms. Dental care would be eliminated for adults, especially galling since research has found such

important links between dental care and a number of conditions, including diabetes, respiratory problems, heart disease and even premature babies.

These cuts are not even penny-wise, since they will wind up "saving" only a small amount of the deficit projected for this year. We have heard ad nauseum from politicians that cuts must be made and made now, because delaying only costs more money. However, we never hear that argument used to address what cutting health care will cost in the near future, much less in the "long run". How much worse is the prospect of these cuts when we now have hope for federal leadership to improve health care, housing, air quality and transportation, just to name a few of the areas so neglected over the last eight years.

The state that is (still) the eighth largest economy in the world has funding somewhere to maintain its health programs while we get to work on a national answer to the uninsured. We urge you to contact your state representatives to ask them not to make these cuts – to have the courage to envision a better California, a more balanced California. You can find your Assembly Member or Senator at <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/yourleg.html>.

– Lynn Kersey, Executive Director

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## MCHA's Advocacy Achieves Major Improvements in Medi-Cal's "Presumptive Eligibility" Program for Pregnant Women

MCHA, along with Neighborhood Legal Services and other advocates, has recently had several major successes in improving coverage under Medi-Cal's Presumptive Eligibility (PE) program for pregnant women.

**Background:** PE is immediate, temporary medical coverage granted by a provider to an eligible woman at her first visit. This coverage allows her to receive important prenatal care early in her pregnancy or to cover a miscarriage or an abortion. This insurance lasts the month that women apply for it and the month after.

**Making PE last longer:** For a woman continuing with her pregnancy, if she applies for Medi-Cal by the end of the following month, when her PE would be ending, and brings proof of her application to the provider, the provider can extend the woman's PE automatically until the end of the following month. In theory, this one-time extension on PE will cover the woman until the county issues her regular Medi-Cal.

In practice, however, it can take much longer for the county to complete an eligibility determination. Until MCHA's recent advocacy, only one date extension was allowed. A provider had to call the state and get permission to extend a woman's PE more than once. Many providers never even realized they had this option and those that did call encountered problems reaching someone at the other end. These were major barriers to women keeping their PE coverage until their Medi-Cal was approved.

Through MCHA's advocacy, the state recently agreed to allow providers to make their own PE extensions upon reviewing the woman's proof that her Medi-Cal application was submitted before her original period of PE ended. Providers no longer have to call the state for permission to extend PE. And the provider can also renew the PE extension for as long as the woman's Medi-Cal application is still pending.

**Making PE cover what is needed:** Recent investigation of debt collection cases against women with PE informed us that the state had omitted

many important "procedure codes" from the list of covered benefits that should be reimbursed under PE. Most of these "missing" items involved tests and procedures for high risk pregnancies and miscarriages. Examples included:

- ambulatory emergency room care and physician services;
- ultrasound for miscarriages (technically know as "spontaneous" or "unspecified" abortions; see Provider Bulletins below);
- pathology reports for miscarriages; and
- many lab tests.

As a result of our team's advocacy, the state agreed to add over 40 procedure codes to the PE list. The additions, published in official bulletins in May and August, will mainly help women with high risk pregnancies or who miscarry.

The state also agreed to automatically reprocess rejected claims involving the new PE procedure codes back to September 1, 2005, or, for ultrasounds, March 1, 2005.

Below is the link to the provider bulletins (see May, 2008 and August, 2008 Obstetrics or General Medicine) or contact MCH Access for more details: [http://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/bulletins\\_menu.asp](http://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/bulletins_menu.asp).

Women who have paid bills or were billed by providers can get assistance: contact MCH Access, or clients in Los Angeles County may call the Health Consumer Center of Neighborhood Legal Services (800-896-3203) for assistance.

**But we are not done yet!** MCHA continues to advocate that the state include ALL "missing" procedure codes for medically necessary ambulatory prenatal care in PE. If you know of any women in this situation, please let MCHA know!

See our new full-color brochure on PE at [www.mchaccess.org/prenatal\\_care.htm](http://www.mchaccess.org/prenatal_care.htm)

## MCHA'S CELIA VALDEZ A "WOMAN OF DISTINCTION"

Celia Valdez, our Director of Outreach, was honored in March of this year by [La Opinion](#) newspaper as a "Woman of Distinction." This is the second year [La Opinion](#) has honored women during March, in recognition of International Women's Day. The event honors women who have "overcome many economic, personal or immigration barriers in their lives and today work with all their effort and dedication to better the lives of others," according to Monica Lozano, [La Opinion's](#) General Manager. Celia was honored for her work in health care with individual clients and to better the systems and coverage available to low income people. She has worked to improve readability and logic in state and county health program applications, to amplify coverage available under temporary programs for pregnant



women and to provide notice via television and radio shows and interviews of the health care available to low income immigrants. She has been a tenacious advocate in individual situations that when resolved, translate into policy changes for hundreds of others. She toils away at resolving medical debt cases, for

example. These tedious but important cases can forever ruin someone's credit and the possibility of buying a house or getting a school loan. More than 300 people were present at the March 27 event, including Celia's very proud and beloved mother, who passed away just months afterward.

MCHA thanks [La Opinion](#) for recognizing Celia's dedication and hard work that brings health and the possibility of a better life to so many in Los Angeles and statewide!

## Our Heartfelt Thanks to Our Most Recent Contributors and Grantors:

Our apologies for any misspellings or omissions. Please call (213) 749-4261 or info@mchaaccess.org with corrections.

- Alta Med Health Services
- Anderson Pursley Insurance
- Baby2Baby
- California Health Care Foundation
- Clothes The Deals
- Comic Relief
- El Pollo Loco
- Emergency Food and Shelter Program, United Way
- First 5 Los Angeles
- Golden State Water Company
- Health Consumer Center of Neighborhood Legal Services
- Health Net
- Hope St. Family Center/California Hospital Medical Center
- Kaiser Permanente Southern California Region
- Korean Resource Center
- La Brea Bakery
- LA Care Health Plan
- LA Collaborative for Healthy, Active Children (LACDPH)
- LA Diaper Drive
- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
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- Shelter Partnership
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- St. John's Well Child and Family Health Center
- State of California (Single Point of Entry)
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*\*Organizations listed for  
 identification purposes only.*

## Wish List {Our United Way donation number is 595702 for workplace giving.}

- Holiday gifts for 100-150 families, such as blankets and children's toys.
- New or gently used slings or other baby carriers
- Sewing machines that work well or need only small repairs
- Sturdy cardboard file boxes
- Yarn for knitting, craft supplies, fabric or gift certificates to stores with these items, such as Joann's, Michael's, or Michael Levine's
- Household items
- Small round office tables
- Computers
- Digital camera
- New or gently used maternity clothing
- Educational toys, children's books in Spanish and English, art supplies, school supplies
- Office chairs
- Small color printers
- New or gently used baby/children's clothing
- Beds that include mattresses still in good shape (our clients sleep on the floor)
- Bookcases
- Office supplies: paper, toner, pens, staples, you name it.
- New or gently used bedding/towels
- Childproofing items: locks, table corners, cabinet dosures, plug covers
- Storage site for donated furniture (near downtown)
- Professional photography for our office, brochures and newsletters.

## Maternal & Child Health Access

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# mch Advocate

## Have enough stuff?

### Ask friends and family to donate to MCH Access!



We will send them a wonderful holiday (or other occasion) card of the beautiful mural hanging in our office, "Imagining Tomorrow", shown above. This mural was a project of our Women's Collective, babies in slings or playing alongside, working with Jose Ramirez, a prominent Los Angeles artist. The women attended workshops to learn design, drawing, perspective and painting skills. We have created a non-denominational card that you can see on our website or we can craft the message to your specifications!

See our website to direct a donation in honor of someone special, [www.mchaccess.org](http://www.mchaccess.org), or use the envelope in this mailing.

## COLECTIVA ITEMS FOR SALE!

See our website for dates and times of area sales, or come into our office before December 22nd. We have aprons, trendy tote bags and more! All of the items are handmade by women who meet to create, gain support from each other and from MCHA and who sell the items at craft fairs and other venues. For more information, see our website, our Fall, 2004 newsletter <http://www.mchaccess.org/newsletters.htm> or contact MCH Access at (213) 749-4261.

**Thank you!**