

For Immediate Release

March 20, 2007

HWTF TASK FORCE MEETING TO EXAMINE CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE IN NORTH CAROLINA

Raleigh, NC – The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund's newly formed Task Force for a Healthier North Carolina will hold a meeting on Monday, March 26th in Winston-Salem to discuss the children's health insurance in North Carolina.

The meeting will focus on the State's Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which was created by Congress and funded jointly by the federal government and states, in response to the growing number of uninsured children in the 1990's. In North Carolina, SCHIP is known as NC Health Choice for Children. Not including those now served through Medicaid, SCHIP benefits more than 110,000 kids. In the United States, SCHIP provides health insurance coverage for approximately 6 million low-income children.

The federal block grant that provides funding for SCHIP was authorized for a period of 10 years beginning in 1998; it is facing federal reauthorization at the end of FY 2007. States were given flexibility in creating their SCHIP programs and the funding debates taking place at the federal level are providing an opportunity for state's to evaluate their programs.

The Task Force members will explore a few main issues related to North Carolina's program: improving outreach and enrollment efforts and expanding children's health insurance coverage as well as strengthening the coordination of care between NC Health Choice and Medicaid/CCNC. The meeting will be held at the Northwest Area Health Education Center (AHEC) in Winston-Salem from 9:00am-1:00pm. Agenda for the meeting is forthcoming.

A new report released today by the Lewin Group commissioned by the Task Force, a national health care and human services consulting firm, provides a legislative history of the NC Health Choice program. The report also highlights successes and challenges of the program and includes issues for consideration at both the federal and state level. For a copy of the Lewin Report, visit: <http://www.healthwellnc.com/LewinSCHIP07report.pdf>.

The Task Force was commissioned by the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund and has partnered with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Lewin Group to provide research and administrative support. This is the second of three health-related issues under examination by the Task Force. The group previously studied the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit for seniors and will examine employer-sponsored health coverage in the coming months. The Task Force will make recommendations about immediate next steps to be taken on the state's healthcare policy agenda on each of these issues.

ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$143 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

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