



## A Partnership that Works: **WIC and the Children's Defense Fund**

By WyKisha McKinney  
Program Director

In Texas, more than 600,000 children are uninsured. More than half of these children are eligible but not enrolled in state health coverage programs like Children's Medicaid and CHIP. The Children's Defense Fund's (CDF) Child Health Outreach and Enrollment project works to ensure a healthy start for Texas children by connecting them to affordable, comprehensive physical and mental health coverage. CDF's work is grounded in the belief that families and communities can come together to improve the health and well-being of children and, in doing so, change the health trajectory of their whole community.

Families USA, an advocate for consumer health care, notes that children with health insurance:

- Are more likely to have a usual source of care.
- Are more likely to have access to preventive care.
- Help close racial disparity gaps.
- Have improved social and emotional development.
- Are better equipped to do well in school.

### Meeting Families Where They Are

CDF's health outreach strategies are rooted in meeting families where they are to best reach eligible uninsured children. Neighborhood groups, businesses, churches, community organizations, libraries and schools are essential partners in identifying community health care needs and designing the best approach in each unique

context. This includes our WIC local agency partners. Cindy Ross, Health Outreach Program Coordinator for CDF, explains, "By being at the WIC clinics, we create sort of a one-stop shop for moms and break down some of the barriers that prevent them from accessing care."

### A Win-Win Partnership in Northeast Texas

WIC's mission to improve the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 is parallel to CDF's objectives. CDF currently provides application assistance at WIC clinics in three northeast Texas counties: Cherokee, Rusk and Smith. "The programs complement one another, which allows us to help families on a whole other level,"

says WIC Director in Northeast Texas, Tecora Smith. WIC's strategy of scheduling consistent appointments for mothers to visit their clinics for services provides an opportunity for CDF's health outreach team to assist those families in real time.

CDF and WIC work together to make sure moms know about our collective services. According to Smith, "Many people view WIC as simply a nutrition education and breastfeeding program, but we are more than that. We have a social services component that allows us to partner with organizations like Children's Defense Fund to help us to take a more comprehensive approach to caring for our clients."

### A Win for Families

CDF's partnership with WIC breaks down significant barriers to accessing health care such as limited transportation, lack of trust in providers, and difficulty navigating challenging systems and procedures. "A lot of our moms have issues with trusting providers," says Smith. "Our moms trust WIC to refer them to an organization that is no harm to them. By having CDF onsite at our WIC clinics, they know this is someone they can trust." Refer-

ring back to the "one-stop shop" approach, Smith states, "When I was a WIC mom it was a one-stop shop. I was able to get WIC, apply for Medicaid, and see the OB-GYN all in one place. As a result, I had a stress-free pregnancy and was prepared to care for my baby. I want that for other mothers." At WIC, CDF not only helps mothers apply for CHIP and Medicaid, but they also help the family choose a health plan and primary care provider and renew their health coverage when the time arrives, reducing the chances of a lapse in coverage.

### Tips for Creating Partnerships that Work

Smith offers these tips for WIC clinics considering partnerships:

- Develop a collaborative mindset. WIC can work with organizations to achieve an all-inclusive approach necessary to best serve our families.
- Learn as much as you can about the partner organization and their program.
- Ensure that families served are protected and that their confidentiality is respected at all times.
- Make sure the goal of the partner organization is aligned with WIC's goals and objectives.

Ross offers these tips for organizations interested in partnering with WIC:

- Determine what works well for both agencies to meet their goals.
- Offer workshops to the WIC staff to learn about your program and what they can expect from your organization.
- Don't add to the WIC staff's workload; come ready with everything you need to work.
- Maintain an open line of communication between everyone involved.

For more information on partnering with the Children's Defense Fund, contact WyKisha McKinney, Health Outreach Program Director, at [wmckinney@childrensdefense.org](mailto:wmckinney@childrensdefense.org) or 713-664-4080.

### References:

Families USA. (2006, July). Why Health Insurance Matters for Children. Retrieved May 29, 2018, from Campaign for Children's Healthcare: <http://www.childrenshealthcampaign.org/assets/pdf/Kids-Why-Insurance-Matters.pdf>.