

UPDATE

A bi-monthly newsletter of the Solano County Health & Social Services Department.

Letter from the Director

Dear Reader,

This edition of **UPDATE** looks at one of the Solano County Board of Supervisor's top priorities - making sure that all of Solano County's children have health insurance. Our County is already close to that goal. According to data from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) only 2.7 percent of Solano County children did not have health insurance in 2003.

Earlier last month, the Solano County Coalition for Better Health - a public/private partnership that includes H&SS, all of the County's hospitals, community clinics, and community and faith-based health and social service providers - began a major campaign to raise private funds to pay to identify and insure the remaining estimated 5,000 children in Solano County without health insurance. The Solano County Board of Supervisors has promised to match every dollar raised up to \$300,000 as part of the effort.

The Health and Social Services Department has an important role to play in that initiative. Employment & Eligibility Services enrolls qualified persons in Medi-Cal. The Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) program works to ensure that the health care needs of children are properly managed. H&SS also forwards applications for the Healthy Families program which is administered by the State. The program offers low cost insurance for children and teens up to age 19. It provides health, dental and vision coverage to children who meet the program rules and do not qualify for Medi-Cal.

Why is health insurance so important for children and for our community? Without insurance, common childhood illnesses often go untreated and can impair a child's physical and mental growth and development. Research shows that uninsured children suffer because they do not have access to adequate medical care. For example:

The Kaiser Family Foundation found that uninsured children are 70 percent less likely than children with insurance to receive medical care for conditions like ear infections, and 30 percent less likely to receive medical attention when they are injured.

A National Health Interview Survey found that 59 percent of uninsured children did not see a doctor for a check-up in the past year and 38 percent of children have no regular place to go for medical care. These factors put uninsured children at higher risk for hospitalization or missed diagnoses of serious conditions.

Evidence shows that in addition to lacking adequate medical care, children without health insurance are at a disadvantage in the classroom. According to a study from Florida, children who do not have health coverage are 25

(Continued on page 2)

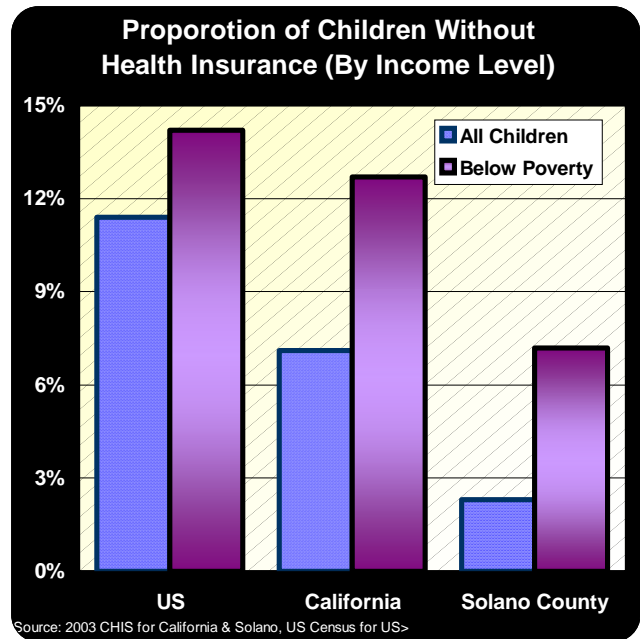
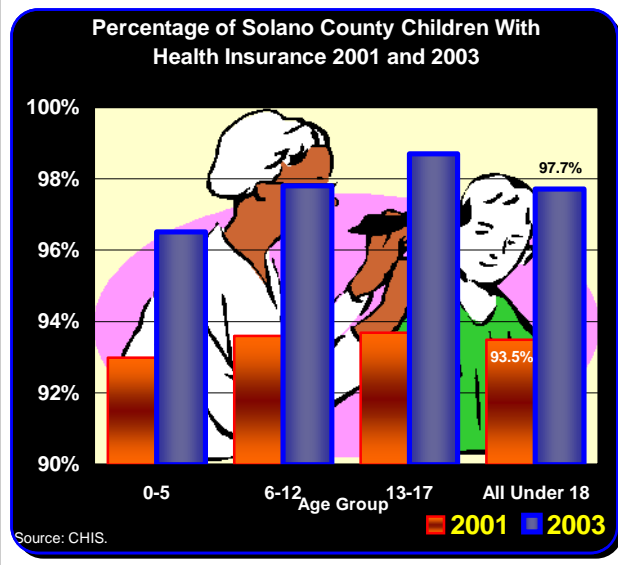


November, 2005
Volume 1, Issue 6

IN THIS ISSUE

Letter from the Director	1
Where Solano County Stands	2
Box: Declining Job-Based Coverage	3
Health Insurance and Doctor Visits	4
Children's Health Insurance by Type	5
Success Story: California county focuses on health care for school-children (from the Palm Beach (Florida) Post)	6
Box: Solano County named as one of 100 best Communities for Children	7
Health & Social Services Index	8

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE: Where Solano County Stands



Letter from the Director

(Continued from page 1)

percent more likely to miss school. A California Health Status Assessment Project on children's health published in 2002 found that children who recently enrolled in health care saw their attendance and performance improve by 68 percent.

Research also provides strong economic reasons for insuring all children. Delayed treatment can result in more complex, more threatening and more expensive care later.

Solano County's aggressive approach to getting all children insured has gained nationwide attention. An article from the Palm Beach (Florida) Post appears on page 6. Reporter Phil Galewitz was impressed by what he found in Solano County while serving in California as a Kaiser Media Fellow. His story holds Solano County up as a model for his home community.

The bottom line is that a healthy start early in life will pay dividends down the road. For more information about the Solano Healthy Kids Campaign contact the Solano Coalition for Better Health at 707-863-4440. For information about SKIP, contact the Solano Kids Insurance Program (SKIP) at 1-800-978-SKIP or 707-863-4444.

Sincerely,

Patrick O. Duterte



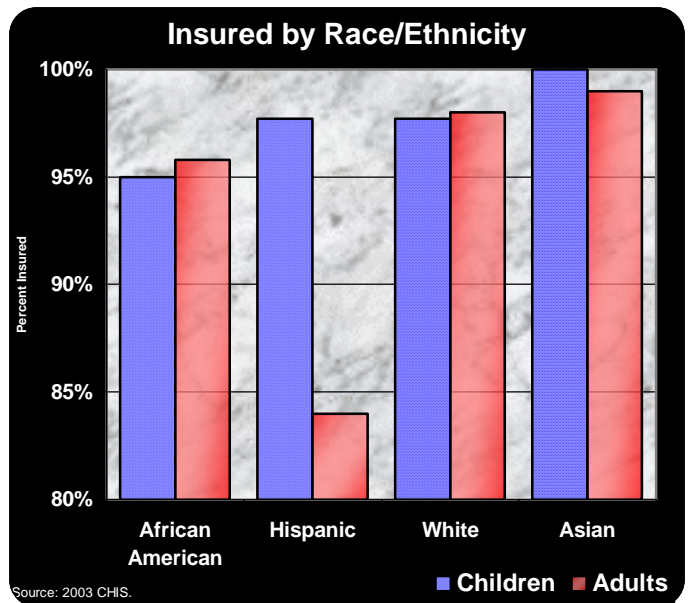
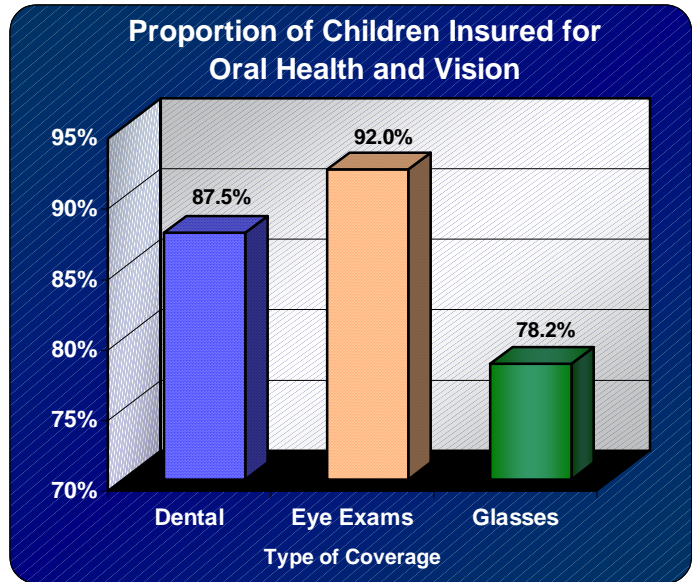
Solano County has one of the lowest percentages of uninsured children in the nation. Solano County is well below the national and state averages (See Page 2).

According to data from the 2003 CHIS survey, 97.7% of all children in Solano County have health insurance. However, for children living below the poverty line, the proportion is 92.3%.

The overall percentage of children with health insurance in Solano County increased from 93.5% to 97.7% between 2001 and 2003.

The proportion of children covered for dental and eye care are lower than for medical care. While 92% of children are covered for eye exams, less than 80% are covered for glasses.

There is little difference in health insurance rates by race or ethnicity among children in Solano County (Lower Right). Among adults, however, Hispanics are much less likely to have insurance than others. Immigration status may play a role in this finding.



Declining job-based health insurance coverage

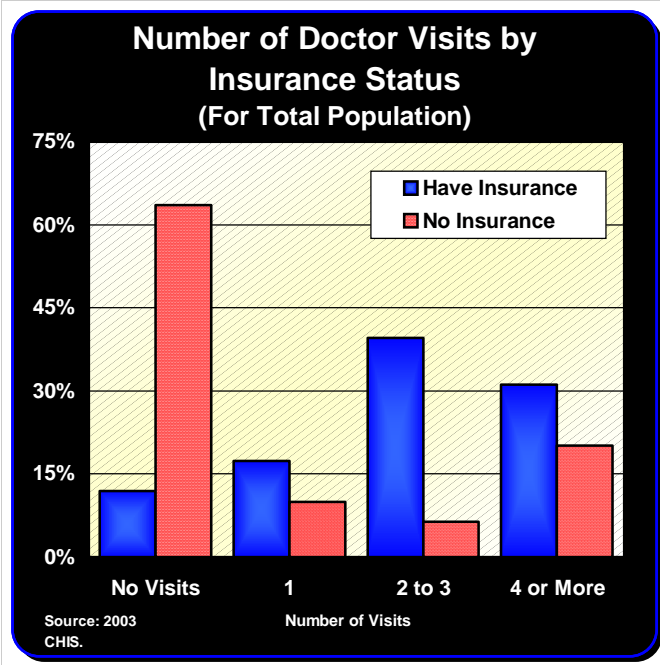
The vast majority of children get their health insurance through their parent's job. (71% in Solano County, See Page 4.) But, as health care costs have risen, many employers have scaled back the insurance that they offer. Many employers have increased the premiums that employees pay for themselves and/or to cover dependents. For those that continue to offer affordable premiums, there is a growing trend among employers to lower insurance costs by putting a substantial burden on employees for paying medical costs — co-pays and deductibles are higher, fewer services are covered.

In either case, increases in health care costs in recent years have been particularly tough on lower-wage workers. An increase in the number of companies that do not offer health insurance or offer inadequate coverage is blamed in part for growing ranks of workers and their dependents on government programs such as Medi-Cal and SKIP.

Although the proportion of children with insurance increased in Solano County between 2001 and 2003, CHIS data also shows that the proportion who were insured during all 12 months of the year decreased slightly during the same period from 95.9% to 93.5%. This finding appears to be due to cutbacks in job-based health insurance.

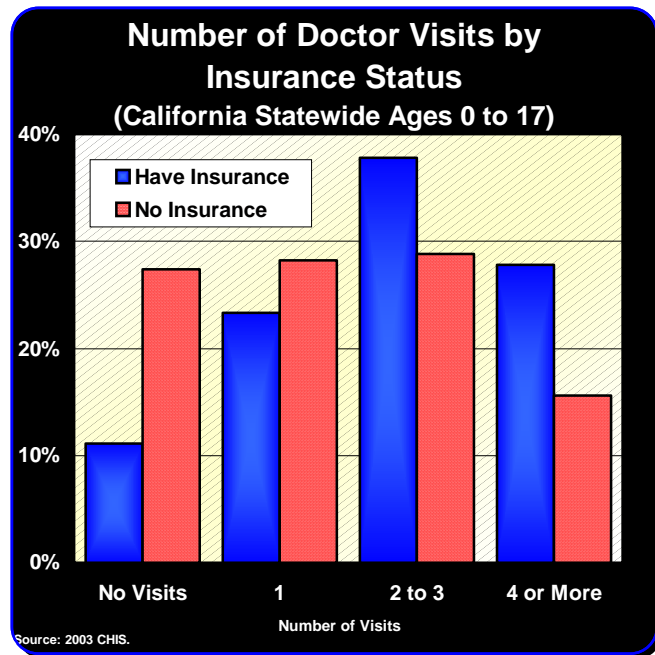
According to an analysis by researchers at the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research*, dramatic increases in the cost of job-based family coverage for the average worker has led to a significant drop in the percentage of child dependents who are covered through their parent's employment. As a result, more and more children are relying on public programs for their insurance. The time gap between loss of private coverage for dependent children and enrollment in a public program may be reflected in the CHIS findings.

* Brown, et. al., The State of Health Insurance in California: Findings from the 2003 CHIS, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, August, 2005.



People with health insurance are more likely to go to the doctor than those without insurance. According to the 2003 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), nearly two-thirds of Solano County residents without insurance made no visits to the doctor. By comparison, less than 12 percent of persons with insurance did not see a physician.

The sample size for Solano County was not large enough to obtain valid data for children and youths. The data for the state as a whole, however, suggests that children are less likely to visit a doctor if they do not have insurance – although the disparity was not as great as for the population as a whole. Over 27 percent of children without health insurance did not visit a physician – more than twice the percentage for children with coverage.



HEALTH INSURANCE & DOCTOR VISITS

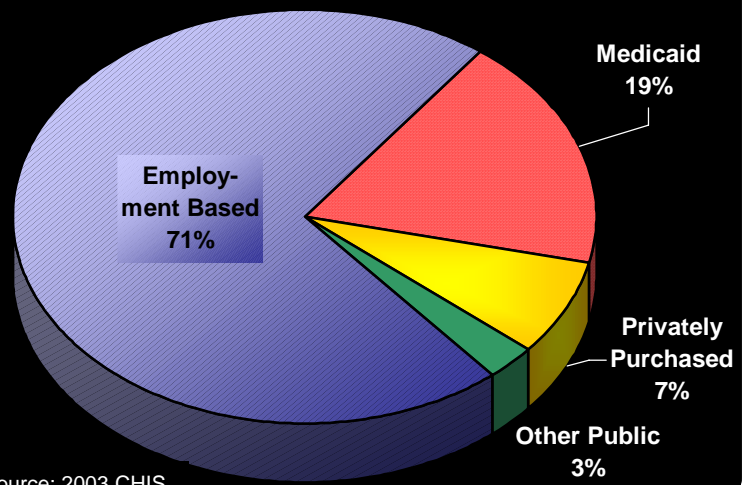


- Approximately 1 of every 5 children under the age of 16 in Solano County — 22 percent — are on the Medi-Cal rolls. (CHIS data shows a slightly lower percentage) The proportion is higher at younger ages.
- 43 percent of all Medi-Cal recipients are children under 16.
- Medi-Cal is California's Medicaid health care program. The program pays for a variety of medical services for children and adults with limited income and resources. Medi-Cal is supported by federal and state taxes. Depending on household income and family size, recipients may be required to pay a portion of their medical costs.

Percentage of All Solano County Children Receiving Medi-Cal by Age Group (April 2005)

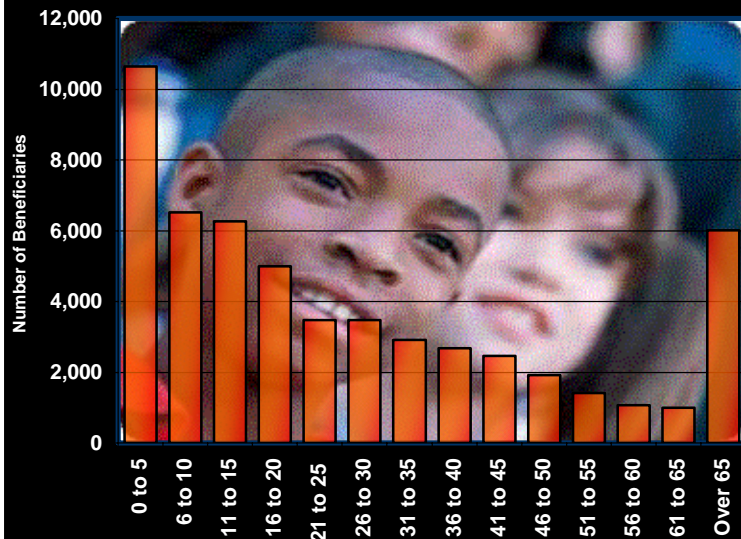
Age Group	Medi-Cal Beneficiaries
0 to 5	27.4%
6 to 10	20.5%
11 to 15	17.8%

Children's Health Insurance Coverage by Source



Source: 2003 CHIS.

Demographic Profile of Medi-Cal Beneficiaries



Source: California Department of Health Services, Medi-Cal Care Statistics Section.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE BY TYPE

California county focuses on health care for schoolchildren

By Phil Galewitz
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

VACAVILLE, Calif. — Two weeks into summer vacation, Markham Elementary School is quiet except for the kindergarten classroom where Maria Rios is holed up with her laptop computer and her appointment book.

Rios isn't a teacher or an administrator, but she plays a key role in the lives of the school's 700 students. Her job is making sure every child has health insurance. She meets with parents at the school three times a week to determine what health coverage their children qualify for and then gets the application process moving.

Thanks to Rios' help, 97 percent of the students at Markham had medical coverage last year. That's up from 70 percent two years earlier and is significantly higher than most schools in low-income areas in California and nationwide.

Rios is one of five school-based outreach workers of the Solano Coalition for Better Health, a group that aims to improve access to health care for the 500,000 residents of Solano County.

The county is a burgeoning rural and suburban area near Napa Valley, about 50 miles east of San Francisco. Focusing mainly on getting residents into existing government health programs, the coalition has helped cut Solano County's rate of uninsured residents from 15 percent to 7 percent.

An aggressive approach

"We're a poor area here, and the parents need help," said Rios, who typically speaks Spanish to parents who call or visit her at the school.

The coalition takes an aggressive approach to getting kids signed up either for Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (in California, it's called Healthy Families), as well as a low-income program offered by giant HMO Kaiser Permanente.

Overcoming early objections about privacy, the coalition has worked to get most schools in this county to ask parents about their kids' health insurance status. The question is posed to all parents when they fill out an emergency contact card at the beginning of each school year.

Parents who lack medical insurance are sent information about available insurance options, and they get a telephone call from outreach workers such as Rios. They are asked to meet with an outreach worker so they can get assistance filling out insurance forms. Later Rios and other workers check with parents to be sure they and their children are enrolled in health care plans.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

Parents say the hands-on help from the outreach workers makes all the difference in getting them through the sometimes cumbersome process of signing up.

"Maria helped me fill out all the papers and told me everything I needed to know," said Ashwan Gill, who now has health coverage for her 7-year-old son, Maheswari.

The Gills had been without health insurance for two years after Ashwan's husband lost a job as a cook. Now, under the State Children's Health Insurance Program, the Gills pay just \$5 when Maheswari goes to the doctor.

Last year, 29 Solano County schools had at least 99 percent of students with health insurance, and seven schools hit 100 percent of students, said Jacque McLoughlin, who heads the Solano Kids Insurance Program for the coalition. The school initiative, heading into its fourth year, has helped enroll 13,000 previously uninsured students.

"This is not a passive strategy," McLoughlin said. "We don't wait for the family to come to us before we go to them."

The Solano Coalition for Better Health gives awards to schools for getting 100 percent of their students enrolled in health plans and gets local publicity for the schools' accomplishment — and schools are engaged in an informal competition to get all students medical benefits.

Most counties rely on posters, notes

In contrast to Solano's aggressive approach, most school districts in the United States, including Palm Beach County's, usually put up posters in schools about health insurance plans and send a note home with students telling parents about insurance options. Few schools follow up with phone calls or set up meetings with parents to help them enroll their children in medical plans.

Palm Beach County school officials, who have worked with the county health care district to inform parents about health insurance plans for children, say they have no idea how many students have gotten coverage through assistance from the school district. Schools don't call parents regarding health care because they say they don't have the staffing.

Solano County's extensive outreach effort in schools, which costs about \$250,000 a year, is considered to pay for itself through improved student health and in turn improved school attendance. In California, as in most states, government money for schools goes up with attendance rates.

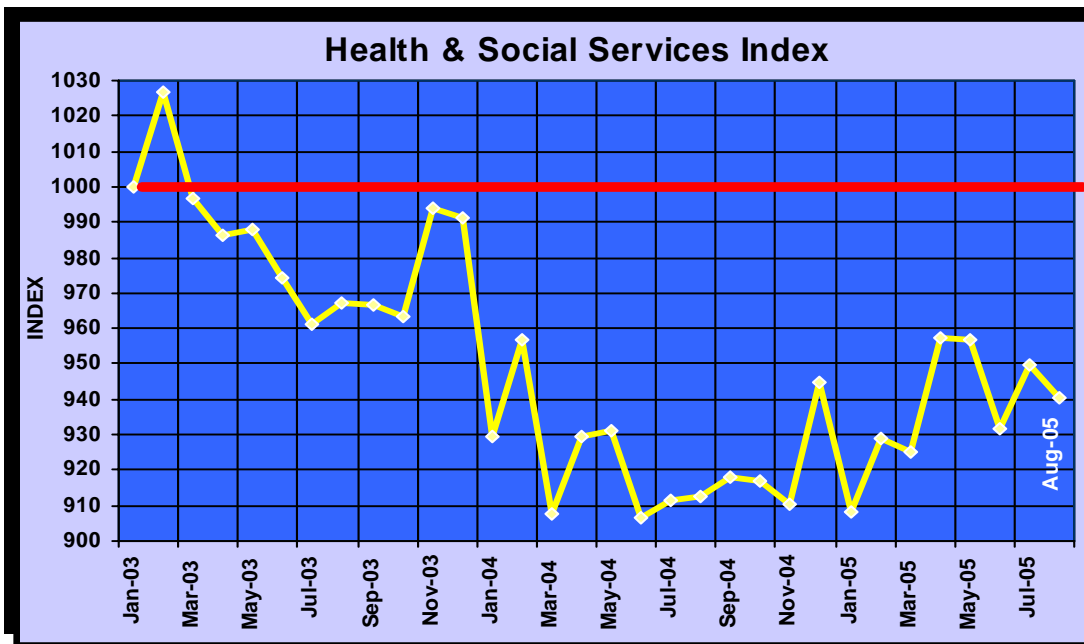
The coalition's outreach work has helped increase health coverage among Principal MaBella Gonzales' 550 students at Widenmann Elementary School to 100 percent from 70 percent three years ago. Attendance rates rose from 90 percent to 94 percent during that time.

"You can't teach kids when they're not healthy and if they don't feel good," she said. "When they are in good health you can teach them and they become better members of society."

© Copyright 2005, The Palm Beach Post.

Solano County was recently named one of the country's 100 best communities for children. Solano County was selected from over 700 applicants. The County is one of only seven communities chosen from percentage of children with health insurance was a major factor in determining the County's rank. Other H&SS initiatives, such as the reduction in infant mortality, also played a role in the ranking. For more information, go to <http://www.americaspromise.org/100Best/update.cfm>.





The **Health & Social Services (H&SS) Index** combines workload data from 15 key services provided by H&SS, along with data on unemployment in Solano County, to provide a monthly indicator of community demand for health and social services.

All of the monthly numbers – clients served, program caseloads, number of unemployed, referrals, etc. – are added together and then converted into an index score. The January 2003 total serves as the index bench line figure of 1,000. The index scores for subsequent months reflect change from the January level. Like the Dow Jones or NASDAQ, higher scores suggest positive developments – fewer people looking for work or requiring the services that H&SS provides, for example. Falling numbers suggest increasing need for H&SS's safety net services.

Please note: The index is not a direct measure of need. Many socioeconomic factors influence need. At the same time, various factors, such as eligibility guidelines and available revenues, influence the amount of service that H&SS can provide regardless of need or demand for service.

INDICATOR	Jan-03	Jun-03	Apr-04	Aug-04	Dec-04	Feb-05	May-05	Jul-05	Aug-05
Number Unemployed	13,800	13,300	12,300	11,800	11,100	12,700	10,400	11,800	11,500
Number of I&R Calls	2,772	2,641	2,179	2,463	2,018	2,001	1,420	1,777	2,197
CalWORKs Cash Assistance Recipients	9,405	9,930	10,816	11,107	11,018	11,146	11,270	11,176	11,545
New CalWORKs Applications & Restoration Requests	521	483	474	554	416	418	457	477	525
Food Stamp Recipients	11,515	12,746	15,022	15,615	16,301	16,084	16,461	16,466	15,221
General Relief Recipients	256	312	372	410	459	453	505	501	502
Medi-Cal Enrollment*	49,059	50,214	53,547	54,074	54,448	54,752	54,898	54,514	54,338
CMSP Cases (End of Month)	4,228	4,724	5,298	5,361	4,696	3,819	3,308	3,302	3,862
Elder or Dependent Adult Abuse Referrals	98	117	93	97	85	85	93	113	95
Elder or Dependent Adult Abuse Confirmed	40	27	26	25	30	33	29	35	36
In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) Authorized Cases	2,254	2,227	2,329	2,348	2,407	2,433	2,453	2,470	2,482
Child Abuse Referrals	390	326	398	292	302	339	364	239	355
Medical Clinic Visits	2,595	2,440	2,437	2,946	2,236	2,228	2,458	1,961	2,385
Dental Clinic Visits	447	405	324	348	394	326	378	231	349
Mental Health Clients	2,701	2,874	2,732	2,529	1,952	2,330	2,527	2,321	2,551
Substance Abuse Clients	699	581	600	668	474	631	733	645	661