



Statement for the Record
House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health
Examining the Extension of Safety Net Health Programs
June 23, 2017

Presented by
North American Society for Pediatric
Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition

On behalf of the North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (NASPGHAN), we urge Congress to enact a long-term funding extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) as quickly as possible. CHIP funding is currently set to expire on September 30, 2017. Swift action on a CHIP funding extension bill would provide much-needed certainty to states and families and ensure that health coverage for the 8.9 million children who rely on CHIP will not be disrupted.

NASPGHAN is an organization comprised of 1,800 members who have specialized training and expertise in caring for children with disorders of the digestive system, liver and nutrition. As we have experienced first-hand, CHIP plans provide critical access to child-specific pediatric subspecialists. Unlike many private insurance plans, which are based on the health needs of adults, CHIP offers insurance with age-appropriate benefits that is affordable for middle-income families.

CHIP has strong bipartisan roots and was developed as a state-federal partnership that gives governors broad flexibility to design programs targeting the needs of their pediatric population. The Society feels that an uncertain future of the CHIP program is a significant problem for states as they are already developing their budgets and negotiating contracts with insurers and providers.

For states to continue their CHIP programs without interruption, they must know that that federal support for CHIP will exist beyond September. If funding is not stabilized, states will have no choice but to begin planning for the impending funding shortfall, which could lead to drastic program cuts through enrollment caps, benefit reductions, reductions in eligibility, or provider payment cuts.

At a time when children's coverage rates have hit record highs – with more than 95 percent of our children enrolled in some type of health coverage – it would be devastating if states begin to dismantle their CHIP programs. Given the uncertainty in the insurance market and as Congress continues to look at broader health system reforms, it is important that CHIP remains a stable source of coverage for children.

Coverage provided through CHIP and Medicaid must be protected. As a Society that is dedicated to the health and well-being of children, we are hopeful that our nation's leaders can work together to continue the current CHIP policy that is working well for states and families. NASPGHAN members urge Congress to make swift action on a long-term CHIP funding extension an immediate priority.