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Kansas Action for Children
Testimony in support of KanCare expansion
Alliance for a Healthy Kansas hearing

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of expanding KanCare. Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.

We support expanding KanCare coverage because it will improve the health and well-being of Kansas children and families. **Healthy Kansas kids and families are critical to our state's future.** Their health depends on regular access to quality care, including wellness visits, screenings, vaccinations, mental health resources, and dental checkups. A lack of health care, especially in childhood, leads to chronic conditions, shorter life expectancy, increased lifetime medical costs, and sicker families.

Most low-income Kansas children are eligible for KanCare's Medicaid and CHIP programs. However, they may not all be signed up to receive that coverage. An increasing number of Kansas kids remain uninsured – an estimated 43,000 in 2019.¹ Expanding KanCare is critical to reversing this concerning trend. Studies show that when parents sign up for insurance programs, it is more likely they will enroll their kids as well. Also, kids' health reflects the health and well-being of their parents. **When parents are insured, kids are more likely to receive regular checkups and preventive care.**

Yet with few exceptions, parents don't currently qualify for KanCare. Expanding KanCare provides another option for affordable health insurance.

Right now, parent/caregivers of children can qualify for KanCare if their income is below 38 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). That amount varies, depending on household size. **If a family of three makes more than \$696 per month (\$8,352/year) they cannot qualify for**

¹ 2019 is the most recent year this data estimate is available.

Alker, Joan, & Corcoran, Alexandra. (October 8, 2020). *Children's uninsured rate rises by largest annual jump in more than a decade*. Georgetown University Health Policy Institute Center for Children and Families.

<https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2020/10/08/childrens-uninsured-rate-rises-by-largest-annual-jump-in-more-than-a-decade-2/>



KanCare in Kansas.² Expanding KanCare offers a solution.

Many employer-sponsored health insurance plans provide coverage for families. But what about families without employer-sponsored insurance (including small businesses) or that can't afford insurance? And what happens when families fall into the coverage gap – making too much to qualify for KanCare, yet not enough to purchase a plan on the insurance marketplace? Expanding KanCare to cover more Kansas parents is an effective multi-generation strategy that will improve the health and well-being of Kansas children.

Healthier moms = healthier babies. A baby's health is also tied to a mom's health. To reduce maternal and infant mortality, low birth weights, pre-term births, and post-birth complications, as well as address stark racial disparities in maternal and infant health, we must make sure moms-to-be have continued access to health care before, during, and after pregnancy.

Pregnant moms without health insurance (and whose family income is less than 171% of the federal poverty level) currently can only be covered by KanCare during pregnancy and then for 60 days after birth. In 2020, KanCare covered an estimated 31% of pregnancies (10,698).³

Short-term coverage is not enough. Moms must have health insurance to access care long before their pregnancy begins and for at least a year postpartum. Expanding KanCare would improve coverage for most of these women as they start and nurture their families.

The health of moms and babies supports the health of our entire state.

For these reasons and more, KAC supports expanding KanCare; this policy is an investment in Kansas children and the adults who care for them that will pay off for generations to come. We call on Kansas lawmakers to support expansion – and pass it – especially as so many federal incentives are currently on the table and the entire state will benefit from this policy implementation.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice our support for KanCare expansion, and please do not hesitate to contact me at heather@kac.org if you have any questions.

² KanCare. (July 2021). *Kansas medical assistance standards*. <https://kancare.ks.gov/docs/default-source/policies-and-reports/kdhe-keesm/kfmam-policy-memos/e-d-policy-memos/2021-e-d-memos/f-8-ks-medical-standard-7-21-v2.pdf>

³ Kaiser Family Foundation. (2020). *Births financed by Medicaid*. <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/state-indicator/births-financed-by-medicaid/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>