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\*\*\* FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE \*\*\*

## Kid Care Children's' Health Insurance Program to Raise Income Eligibility Levels in July

CHEYENNE - Officials from the Wyoming Department of Health said today that income eligibility levels will rise in July for the Kid Care CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) making free or low-cost health insurance more accessible to thousands of children in the state.

Patricia Guzman, the CHIP Program Manager for the agency, said that eligibility levels will rise from 185 percent of the federal poverty level to 200 percent.

Currently, a family of four can earn up to \$2,983 a month before taxes - or about \$35,797 a year and still be eligible. A family of three - a single parent and two kids for example - can earn up to \$2,480 per month before taxes. Beginning in July, eligibility will expand so a family of four will be able to earn up to \$3,225 a month before taxes - or about \$38,700 a year and still be eligible.

Many people don't apply because they feel they're not eligible if they work or their incomes are too high, said Guzman. "My advice is to apply because sometimes family structure makes a difference in how we look at people's income. Naturally the program does not cover everyone, but it can be a lifesaver for those who are eligible."

Recent U.S. Census data shows that there are currently 9,000 children in Wyoming who are uninsured and also live in families who are at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, Guzman said.

Kid Care CHIP is the Wyoming version of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) funded by the state and federal government for uninsured children. Kid Care CHIP reaches out to working families who do not have access to health insurance for their children or may not be able to afford dependent coverage. The program provides health, vision and dental insurance to children in Wyoming who are uninsured and who meet the eligibility requirements. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Wyoming provides the medical and vision coverage and Delta Dental provides the dental coverage. Premiums are not required, but families do share in the cost of their child's care by paying co-payments for services used.

Since the implementation of Kid Care in 1999, over 10,000 previously uninsured children have had health coverage and access to preventive health services, Guzman said. Currently, there are over 4,000 children enrolled.

Because of Kid Care CHIP, more than \$17 million have been invested in local communities through payments to medical providers for services since December 1999. Prior to Kid Care CHIP, these services may have resulted in uncompensated care costs which then result in cost shifting to other providers

May 1-8 is Cover the Uninsured Week. There is no better time to tell someone with uninsured children about Kid Care CHIP. The application process itself is very simple. Families can call 1-877-KIDSNOW (1-877-543-7669) and request an application. The application packet will be mailed to them free of charge and it includes a self addressed stamped envelope that can be mailed directly to the Kid Care CHIP eligibility office in Chevenne.

Those who are unemployed or have very low incomes are also encouraged to call 1-877-KIDS NOW (1-877-543-7669) to receive an application for Wyoming's EqualityCare. Each application will be

evaluated to determine an appropriate program for the family applying.

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For more information, please contact Ross Doman, Public Information Officer, Wyoming Department of Health, (307) 777-6420.