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HHS APPROVES PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN WITH LIFE-THREATENING CONDITIONS

Low-income children in Florida, who have life-threatening conditions, and their families will soon have access to a new set of benefits to help them with their unique needs, according to an announcement today by HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt.

Secretary Leavitt approved an innovative new Medicaid model of care for children that will add special respite care and counseling for families to the package of curative and palliative care critically ill children already receive under the Medicaid program.

Traditionally, Medicaid did not offer needed respite services to family members providing what can be intensive at-home services to critically ill children, nor did the program offer family counseling. The new program will not require children to be in the last six months of life for families to receive the counseling and respite services.

"I am approving this new Medicaid program in Florida because I believe we must do everything possible to lighten the heavy burden on families of children who may be near the end of their lives," said Secretary Leavitt. "This is a step beyond traditional hospice rules, and the right thing to do for these most vulnerable children and their families."

At any one time, Children's Hospice International (CHI) estimates that 10 million children in the United States are living with a serious chronic or life threatening disease. About 30 percent of those children are Medicaid beneficiaries.

"The diagnosis of a life-threatening disease in a child is devastating for families," said Mark B. McClellan, M.D., Ph.D., administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the federal agency that oversees the Medicaid program. "This waiver will combine medical and support services currently available in Medicaid with counseling and respite care that are also important for families with critically ill children."

"Florida Medicaid is committed to caring for Florida's most vulnerable with compassion and common sense," said Alan Levine, secretary of the state's Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA). "By providing key support services to children and their families as they cope with life-limiting conditions, CMS and AHCA will not only ensure that immediate needs are met, but we'll make a significant contribution to the quality of life of Florida's most courageous children and families."

“This waiver is the result of a truly effective partnership between government and the non-profit community so that families of children with life-threatening conditions can get more compassionate care,” said CHI Founding Director Ann Armstrong-Dailey. “These families will get better care thanks to the leadership of Secretary Leavitt, Dr. McClellan and the technical support team at CMS.”

State officials hope to serve nearly 1,000 children in the waiver, which has been initially approved under Section 1915(b) of the Social Security Act to run through June 2007. The program will exist in seven pilot sites around the state.

The Florida demonstration, Partners In Care, is based on the CHI Program of All-inclusive Care for Children (CHI PACC). CHI is a Virginia-based non-profit organization.

This proposal is the first of a multi-state effort to implement CHI PACC nationwide. CMS has awarded approximately \$3.2 million to five states and CHI between 2000-2003.

For more information about Medicaid hospice services go to:
www.cms.hhs.gov/medicaid/services/hospice.asp.

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