



CaliforniaKids Healthcare Foundation Issue Brief

Outreach Strategies and Experience: Reaching out to low-income populations

ABOUT CALIFORNIAKIDS: As the first and only program of its kind in California, CaliforniaKids (“CalKids”) has been characterized by innovation since its inception. Our financing model, benefit design, and provider network are all part of a successful program providing access to quality health care services for children. The Board and staff of the program knew that to be innovative meant taking risks and being willing to test new ideas; CalKids has done that successfully and gained valuable experience along the way. We believe by sharing what we’ve learned with policymakers and other key stakeholders, about access, financing and delivery of health care to children, we can improve the system and the lives of those we touch.

This Issue Brief presents findings from several evaluations of the CalKids program and details experiences and lessons learned in outreach to low-income, hard-to-reach families. The outreach experience described herein is associated with the introduction of a children’s health program introduced in the early 1990s. CalKids has provided access to health care services for more than 70,000 children statewide.

Outreach experience and lessons learned

CalKids learned the value of partnerships early on, reaching out to a variety of organizations, including schools, health coalitions, and local clinics. Partnering with already well-established programs in communities lent CalKids credibility and visibility. Because many of CalKids’ children are from hard-to-reach families, partnering with trusted local organizations helped CalKids identify and enroll eligible children. School nurses were especially important during CalKids’ early outreach efforts, as nurses knew the children and had trusted relationships with their parents.

School nurses were the key to early success in the Pasadena-based *Young & Healthy* program. This program provides health care services to children through volunteer physicians on an episodic basis. The concern was that while children received necessary care when needed, the *Young & Healthy* program did not provide a medical home, nor was it designed to do so. CalKids partnered with *Young & Healthy* to identify eligible children and enroll them into the CalKids program, thereby providing them with much-needed continuity of care and a medical home.

Another example of an innovative CalKids outreach strategy was the *Vaughn Street Elementary School* project in Pacoima, California. This project involved working with “involved parents” or *promotores* to identify all children who were uninsured and enroll them into either a government-sponsored health program or CalKids. The *promotores* assisted us in educating parents about insurance concepts and promoted appropriate utilization

of the program. Together we were able to design and implement a school-based health clinic to provide children with basic preventive and primary health care services at the school.

These are just two examples of how CalKids was able to establish a local presence for itself through other trusted organizations. Without the aid of its outreach network, CalKids would likely have faced impediments both in locating hard-to-reach children and families and in fostering the trust necessary for families to enroll their children in the program.

LESSON LEARNED: Building a local presence through established, trusted organizations is key to successful outreach.

Unexpected consequences

An unexpected consequence of CalKids’ active outreach efforts was the ability to increase enrollment for other programs. Through its partnerships, CalKids was able to identify families with children whose immigration status varied. Often, younger children were born in the United States and qualified for government-sponsored health care programs, while their older siblings did not have the necessary documentation. CalKids served as an option for undocumented children, thereby ensuring that all children in such families had access to health care services. The result was increased enrollment in *Medi-Cal* and *Healthy Families* along with a corresponding decrease in the overall number of uninsured children.

As a result of CalKids’ strong partnerships we were able to help educate families on how to navigate the health care system. Many of CalKids’ families had never had health insurance and did not understand basic insurance concepts. CalKids was able to help families become informed health care consumers and gain a positive experience with the health care system.

LESSON LEARNED: Establishing trusted relationships require a significant investment of time. Identifying individuals and organizations that can facilitate access to target populations is critical to success; and nurturing these relationships over time serves to deepen community acceptance, which is critical to successful outreach.

LA CalKids Outreach Experience¹

In 1999, Mayor Richard Riordan partnered with CalKids to challenge local businesses, political leaders, foundations, and individuals to address the issue of uninsured children in the city of Los Angeles. Funding for the LA CalKids Program came from the Community Health Improvement Initiative of the LA Care Health Plan. This initiative targeted undocumented, uninsured children living in households with incomes less than 250 percent of the FPL (Federal Poverty Level). Within two years, the LA CalKids Program had enrolled 6,000 children, exceeding its initial target of 4,000. Nine out of ten children enrolled had no previous private health coverage.

Outreach efforts to enroll children in the LA CalKids program involved a variety of organizations and outreach approaches, most using trusted, local agents. No single strategy emerged as superior in attracting enrollment. Instead, effective outreach was a result of diverse methods including word-of-mouth, culturally appropriate approaches adapted to the local population, and emphasis among outreach workers on overcoming client concerns about the effect of enrollment on their immigration and citizenship status.

Outreach Lessons Learned from LA CalKids

- Low-cost and small group approaches, such as parent workshops and health fairs appeared to do better than mass market, paid advertising.
- Producing program-specific, language-appropriate flyers helped communicate the message to parents
- Schools were identified as key elements to success in the outreach and enrollment process.
- Word-of-mouth proved the strongest communication/enrollment mechanism.

The experience and outcomes described above have repeatedly been successful over the seventeen years CalKids has been serving children and families throughout California.

Conclusion

Throughout the years, CalKids has sought to improve its program and operations through experience, innovation, and evaluation. Although traditional research studies have informed several program improvements and CalKids has developed and implemented several innovative strategies of its own, the Foundation believes that its greatest lessons learned have come directly from the families, children, and communities it serves.

The aforementioned lessons learned can serve as building blocks for other agencies and organizations seeking to implement efforts similar to that of CalKids. CalKids considers these lessons learned to be universal, as such; they can be implemented by any organization working with low-income families and communities. In summary, they are as follows:

- **Trust.** Build trust by involving your target audience; they will spread the word.
- **Partnerships.** Engage local agencies and organizations in your work; build bridges.
- **Demographics.** Know your audience; be respectful of their privacy, know that culture and values matter.
- **Local presence.** Ensure that you have local points of contact in the community; audiences need to sense that they are “connected.”
- **Flexibility.** Demonstrate awareness and understanding of the diverse needs of the communities you serve, and be prepared to offer a variety of solutions to meet unique needs.
- **Keep it simple.** Keeping your outreach strategy simple gives you flexibility and the ability to adapt it for greater understanding and acceptance.

CaliforniaKids Healthcare Foundation is an independent non-profit organization founded in 1992 with the mission to provide uninsured children access to basic health care services.

To accomplish its mission CaliforniaKids partners with corporations, private industry, foundations, health care providers, and community organizations.

More than 70,000 children who are not eligible for government-sponsored health care programs and whose parents cannot afford the cost of private medical insurance have found access to health care services through CaliforniaKids.

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¹ Evaluation of the Los Angeles CalKids Program: Executive Summary, February 2002. The California HealthCare Foundation