

## Obama signs law giving more kids access to dental care

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Just three weeks into his new job as chief executive of the U.S., President Barack Obama has done something former President George W. Bush refused to do: extend health coverage -- including dental -- to 4 million uninsured American children.

On Wednesday the U.S. House of Representatives passed the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) by an overwhelming majority (290-135), according to news reports. Hours later, Obama signed the program into law.

In its current version, SCHIP -- which was established in 1997 -- provides medical insurance to about 10 million children whose families can't afford it on their own but are too wealthy to be eligible for Medicaid. States have the choice whether to use the money for dental care.

The new SCHIP legislation calls for \$32.8 billion to be spent to insure children from low-income homes through 2013. Over the next four years, up to 13 million children could be covered under the plan.

Former President Bush twice vetoed a similar spending increase in 2007.

In a prepared statement, the Children's Dental Health Project (CDHP) said it "applauds President Obama and this Congress for moving quickly and demonstrating that children's access to proper dental care is a major priority. "

The CDHP noted that the legislation provides a stable dental benefit for SCHIP-eligible children for the first time, along with provisions that include coverage for dental care, oral health education for new parents, expanded access for health center patients, and increased accountability and quality of care for millions of children whose families are unable to afford private dental insurance.

Oral Health America called the president's signing of the SCHIP reauthorization "a sweet start" to Children's Dental Health Month.

"This is a bill that was vetoed twice by the previous administration, and we recognize the importance of its passage now as a significant step towards the inclusion of dental care in healthcare reform," Beth Truett, president and CEO of Oral Health America, said in a press release.