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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Celebrates
Children's Health at Annual Luncheon**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

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Providence RI, – Over 100 community leaders gathered today for the seventh annual luncheon, *A Celebration of Children's Health*, to celebrate the progress the state has made in achieving positive health outcomes for Rhode Island's children. The luncheon was held on **Monday, November 19, 2007 from noon to 1:30 p.m. at The Providence Marriott's Marquis Room** (located on the corner of Charles and Orms Streets).

Among the positive trends in children's health are that Rhode Island ranks #1 best for prenatal care and #1 best for the child death rate (with the lowest rates of deaths for children ages 1 to 14), and in the top 10 for timely childhood immunizations.

Rhode Island is a national leader in providing access to health insurance coverage for Rhode Island's children and families. In 2006, 93.6% of Rhode Island's children under age 18 were insured, compared to 89.0% of children nationally. Research shows that insured children are more likely than uninsured children to receive preventive care and have a regular health care provider. Children with health insurance are more likely to receive treatment for health conditions such as asthma and ear infections, that if left untreated can have life-long consequences and lead to more serious health problems. Much of Rhode Island's success in increasing access to health insurance and comprehensive health care for children is due to RItE Care, Rhode Island's Medicaid managed care program for low-income working families.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT stated, "We know that when children have a regular health care provider who they can go to for preventive and primary care, they will thrive and do better in school. They will have better health outcomes over the long term. By investing in RItE Care, Rhode Island's leaders have made a smart investment in the future of Rhode Island."

Currently in Rhode Island there are an estimated 17,000 uninsured children. Of these, 10,000 already are eligible for RIte Care. The remaining 7,000 children live in families with income over 250% FPL and therefore are not currently income eligible for RIte Care. Most of these children are not covered by private insurance because their parents' employer does not offer health insurance, puts limits on which employees are eligible (through initial waiting periods and/or excluding temporary, part-time or seasonal employees), or has employee premiums that are unaffordable.

For the third consecutive year, *U.S. News and World Report* and the National Committee for Quality Assurance rated each of Rhode Island's three RIte Care Health Plans among the top ten Medicaid managed care plans in the country in a joint report released in October 2007. The ranking is based on clinical health indicators and customer satisfaction ratings. RIte Care's three health plans are Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island (ranked 2nd), Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Rhode Island (ranked 3rd) and UnitedHealthcare (ranked 9th).

Covering Kids awards were presented to elected officials, government leaders and community partners for their contributions to increase access to health insurance for children through RIte Care. Honorees include: Governor Donald Carcieri, Lt. Governor Elizabeth Roberts, U.S. Representative Patrick Kennedy, Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Paiva Weed, Senate Finance Chair Stephen Alves, Senator June Gibbs, Senator Rhoda Perry, House Majority Leader Gordon Fox, Representative Thomas Slater, Andrew Snyder, MD (Chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics, RI Chapter) and Edward Quinlan (Hospital Association of Rhode Island).

"Rhode Island has long been a leader in providing access to affordable health insurance coverage for children and families. Rhode Island's continued investment in RIte Care has yielded positive improvements in children's health. We are so close to having 100% of children covered; it's time for us to finish the job and cover all kids. Taking the final step and covering all Rhode Island children will benefit us all," noted Ms. Bryant.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, education, safety and development of Rhode Island's children.