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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 eighth 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 17, 2008 from noon to 1:30 p.m. at The Providence Marriott's Marquis Room** (located on the corner of Charles and Orms Streets).

Rhode Island ranks among the top states for a high quality health care system, high rates of prenatal care, childhood immunizations, children's health insurance coverage, and low rates of child deaths. 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.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, stated, "Health coverage means that children stay in the classroom and out of the doctor's office. Whether it's glasses to see the blackboard or an inhaler for soccer practice, kids get the care they need to grow up healthy and strong. By investing in RIte Care, Rhode Island's leaders have made a smart investment in the future of Rhode Island. Child health coverage is one of the most cost-effective investments a state can make. As the state faces challenging budget times, protecting our long-term investment in RIte Care and RIte Share is more important now than ever."

Rhode Island is among the top 11 states in the U.S. in providing access to health insurance coverage for Rhode Island's children and families. In 2007, 93.1% of Rhode Island's children under age 18 were insured, compared to 89.0% of children nationally. In addition, Rhode Island ranks in the top ten states for the quality of health care provided through its Medicaid managed care plans. For the fourth 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 on November 9, 2008. 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 4th), Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Rhode Island (ranked 8th) and UnitedHealthcare (ranked 10th).

RItE Care has a long history of producing positive health outcomes for children and parents. The most recent data were highlighted in a report available today at the luncheon. Positive outcomes include the following:

- Children and adults enrolled in RItE Care have the **lowest percentage of emergency admissions** to the hospital.
- Children in Rhode Island who have either RItE Care or private health insurance have **fewer preventable hospitalizations** than uninsured children.
- Parents enrolled in RItE Care have the **lowest rates of preventable hospitalizations**, compared with those with private insurance or those without health insurance.
- More women enrolled in RItE Care are **receiving prenatal care in the first trimester of pregnancy** than when the health insurance program began in 1993.
- **Fewer women enrolled in RItE Care smoke during pregnancy** now than in 1993.
- The percentage of women enrolled in RItE Care with **short intervals between births is lower** than that of women enrolled in private insurance.
- **Fewer Rhode Island babies are dying in the first year of life**, with infant mortality rates dropping among publicly-insured infants.
- The **low birthweight rate for infants enrolled in RItE Care is lower than the national rate** and has been stable over the past decade, while the percentage of low birthweight infants born to women with private insurance in Rhode Island has increased.
- **Children and parents with no health insurance experience negative health outcomes in all of these areas.**

In her remarks, Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, noted, "Rhode Island has long been a leader in children's health coverage. In difficult economic times, it is

even more important to make sure that families continue to have the health security that comes with affordable, comprehensive health coverage. Now is the time for Rhode Island's leaders to maintain our commitment to making sure that all children have health coverage. We must keep our focus on maintaining the effective mix of employer-sponsored insurance and access to RItE Care and RItE Share that has been such a policy success." Nearly two-thirds of children (160,667) living in Rhode Island are covered through employer-sponsored health insurance; slightly less than one-third are covered through public health insurance programs including Medicaid, RItE Care and RItE Share (72,000); and the remaining insured children have coverage through the direct purchase of insurance in the individual market (9,667) or through other non-Medicaid government health insurance programs, such as Medicare (7,333).

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, and RItE Share, Rhode Island's premium assistance program for working families who can not afford offered employer-sponsored insurance. Currently in Rhode Island 6.9% of children under age 18 have no health insurance, up from a low of 4.3% in 2002. There are an estimated 17,000 uninsured Rhode Island children. Of these, 62% are eligible for RItE Care based on family income. The remaining 38% live in families with income over 250% of the federal poverty level 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.

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: U.S. Senator Jack Reed, Lt. Governor Elizabeth Roberts, Senate Majority Leader (in coming Senate President) M. Teresa Paiva Weed, Senator Rhoda Perry, Representative Frank Ferri, Representative Edwin Pacheco, Providence Mayor David Cicilline and Warwick Mayor Scott Avedisian. Community leaders receiving awards were Reverend Donald Anderson (Rhode Island Council of Churches), Patricia Flanagan, MD (Hasbro Children's Hospital), and Margo Pires (East Bay Community Action Program).

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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.