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## **Health care providers meet to speak in favor of governor's Illinois Covered plan**

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MARION — State officials met with members of Shawnee Health Services and Franklin-Williamson Human Services Wednesday to discuss Gov. Rod Blagojevich's Illinois Covered health care plan.

Larry Woolard, Director for Southern Illinois Economic Development for the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity said the Governor's plan to provide every Illinoisan with access to affordable health coverage will generate nearly \$690 million in new Illinois business activity when fully implemented.

"This investment will also create more than 5,800 new Illinois jobs," Woolard said. "Not only does Illinois Covered make sure everyone is able to get healthcare they can afford, but hospitals and healthcare centers in Southern Illinois also will benefit from an additional influx of \$64 million in healthcare spending to expand, invest in new technology and put more people to work."

In the Southern Illinois region, 1,500 new jobs have been created in the healthcare and education sector since 2003, according to the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistic. In 2006, 18,500 jobs in the healthcare and education sector accounted for 12.8 percent of all the region's jobs, making healthcare and education the third ranked sector in the region. Illinois has ranked first or second among Midwest states in the number of new jobs added within the healthcare and education sectors for 15 consecutive months.

All Kids, which took effect last year, extended coverage to all children in the state, however, approximately 1.4 million adults in Illinois are currently uninsured. A majority, roughly 75 percent, are from families with moderate incomes.

The proposed plan will provide affordable coverage to the uninsured and will also help many middle income families and small businesses that are currently enrolled in health insurance plans save thousands a year on healthcare costs. The plan will also reform the existing healthcare system to improve quality and require more accountability.

Connie Favreau, Assistant Director and Operating Officer for Shawnee Health Services and John Markley, Administrator for Franklin-Williamson Human Services were at a press conference to endorse the Illinois Covered plan and discuss how the plan would help the joint effort of the two agencies to serve Williamson, Franklin and Jackson Counties.

A recent state grant has helped the agencies expand services to the area.

Dr. A.J. Meyer is the only child and adolescent psychiatrist in the Southern Illinois area.

"I have had many parents tell me that before I came here they had to travel over three hours round-trip for their child to be treated," Meyer said.

The Governor has linked financing for the Illinois Covered plan with his proposed Gross Receipts Tax.

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