

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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Child support program works to secure health insurance coverage for kids

Bismarck, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services is addressing the healthcare needs of children by strengthening the enforcement of medical support orders. The Child Support Enforcement program is sending National Medical Support Notices directly to employers of noncustodial parents who are court-ordered to provide health insurance coverage for their children. This enforcement effort was initiated at the federal level and approved by the 2003 North Dakota Legislature.

The department's Child Support Enforcement Division implemented the enforcement tool in October 2003, and through January 1, 2004, the division issued about 1,020 medical support notices. Health insurance coverage for children is subsequently established if an employer offers dependent health insurance coverage and if the noncustodial parent qualifies for the employer's health coverage program.

The standardized National Medical Support Notice is intended to simplify and streamline the process of enrolling children in their noncustodial parent's employment-related health insurance coverage. Use of the notice to enforce health insurance coverage is expected to benefit families, employers, insurers, and taxpayers.

Previously, courts enforced medical support when a noncustodial parent failed to provide health insurance coverage. Child Support Enforcement Division Director Mike Schwindt said, "Now enforcement can also be handled administratively, making the National Medical Support Notice the latest tool that state and county child support enforcement staff can use to meet the needs of children."

Schwindt said noncustodial parents were notified last fall that the state would begin implementing the medical support notice, as well as other enforcement tools. The state agency has also conducted employer outreach, and information about the National Medical Support Notice appears in the employer information section of the Child Support Enforcement Division's website at www.childsupportnd.com.

Schwindt had positive comments for employers who are already required by federal and state law to report newly hired and rehired employees to the Child Support Enforcement Division. "By withholding child support payments from employees' paychecks and enrolling children in their parents' health insurance plans, employers help ensure the financial security of many North Dakota children," he said.

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