



# PICO Network News

PICO National Network | *Unlocking the Power of People™*

## **PICO leaders find common ground on children's health and homeownership**

### ***PICO's first New Voices Leadership Conference***

On May 23-25, 2005 325 clergy and lay leaders from 150 cities and 18 states traveled to Washington for PICO National Network's first New Voices Leadership Conference. They came to a deeply divided capital to bring a unifying faith voice to national politics and to find bipartisan solutions on two issues fundamental to families: children's health care and homeownership.



### ***Reaching out to both parties***

PICO leaders met with 90 congressional offices (42 Republican and 48 Democratic) and held face-to-face meetings with seven senators and 40 representatives. They also met with the key Republican and Democratic staff on committees that handle health care and housing policy, as well as with officials from the White House Domestic Policy Council and the Office of Faith-based Initiatives. On Tuesday evening, May 24 PICO organized a Spirit of Faith event in the Senate to introduce the network's accomplishments and agenda to members of Congress and their staff.

During the New Voices Leadership Conference PICO laid the ground work for national organizing campaigns on Children's Health Care and Homeownership.

### ***Children's Health Care***

With more than 8 million low-income children lacking insurance, children's health care is one of the great moral and political issues of our time. Children without health coverage get sick more often, stay sick longer and are less likely to get the preventive care they need to thrive in school. More than half the children in the country who lack insurance are eligible for public coverage. The rest are either immigrant children, barred from coverage under current federal rules, or children in families whose are not poor enough to qualify.

For the past five years PICO has worked at a local and state level to increase health coverage for children and families. People Acting in Community Together, the PICO federation in San Jose developed a first-in-the-nation program that provides affordable coverage to all children in Santa Clara County. PICO California held a town hall meeting with 4,200 people on children's health care in April 2005. The key decision makers, Governor Schwarzenegger's Health Secretary Kim Belshe, Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez and Senate President Don Perata agreed to work on policies that would provide health insurance for more than 800,000 children in the state.

Now PICO is developing a national campaign to win health coverage for every child in America. PICO leaders believe this is an essential step toward covering the more than 40 million people in the United States without health insurance. Over the coming years PICO will be removing the barriers that stand in the way of children getting the care they need, making children's health care a priority for elected officials and reshaping federal policy so that states are able to cover all children.

### ***Homeownership***

With housing prices sky high in many communities, low-income and working families have been priced out of the American dream. In other communities facing blight and disinvestment, homeownership rates are actually falling. PICO federations around the country have helped create thousands of homes as a way to stabilize neighborhoods and strengthen families.

Now PICO is working at a federal level to support policies that create home ownership opportunities for working families. One important proposal is the Home Ownership Tax Credit, bi-partisan legislation that would provide funding to help build and renovate an estimated 50,000 affordable homes in low and moderate income communities each year.

### ***From research to strategy***

The New Voices Leadership Conference provided PICO leaders with the opportunity to continue to learn how public policy is made in Washington. They held research meetings with Rodney Whitlock, Health Policy Advisor to Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA) who chairs the Senate Finance Committee, Dawn Horner, Deputy Director of the Children's Partnership and Buzz Roberts, Vice President for Policy of the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC).

PICO leaders also met with policy organizations and congressional staff to learn more about federal policy on issues of immigration, high school reform and violence prevention. PICO will continue to explore opportunities to influence policy in these areas, as the network focuses its immediate attention on health care and housing.

Program officers from key PICO funders and other PICO allies participated as critical observers to help strengthen the Leadership Conference. They included Cris Doby (Charles Stewart Mott), Chantel Walker (Marguerite Casey), Lori Bezahler (Edward W. Hazen), Lee Winkelman, (Veatch), Terri Langston (Public Welfare), Sara Kay, (Nathan Cummings), Martha Toll (Butler Family Fund), Ron White (Building Utopia), Spence Limbocker (Neighborhood Funders Group), Terry Boggs (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), and Seth Borgos (Center for Community Change).

### ***Next Steps***

During June the fifty PICO federations will be considering the recommendations to initiate national organizing campaigns on children's health care and homeownership. Hundreds of leaders are expected to participate in these deliberations. Once the recommendations are ratified, PICO organizations will begin coordinated organizing work at a local and state level and collaborate to influence policy in Washington.

*For more information please visit [www.piconetwork.org](http://www.piconetwork.org).*