

Support *Cover the Uninsured Week*: Making Uninsured Americans a Priority on the Nation's Agenda

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The issue of the uninsured is one of America's biggest health challenges, and the situation is growing worse. In response, health philanthropies from coast to coast and some of the nation's most influential organizations in the United States are joining together to support *Cover the Uninsured Week* from March 10-16, 2003. We hope you will join us in supporting this unprecedented foundation-led educational effort so that we can speak with one voice on behalf of the nation's uninsured.

The current problem is all too familiar to those of us who care deeply about the health of all Americans. According to the latest figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, 41.2 million people – 14.6 percent of the U.S. population – were uninsured in 2001, an increase of 1.4 million from the previous year. More than 8 million of the uninsured are children, and 8 out of 10 uninsured Americans are in working families. The problem is growing worse because of the soft economy. Unfortunately, the number of uninsured Americans in 2002 is projected to be even higher.

Americans without health care coverage live sicker and die younger as a result. Studies have shown that uninsured women who develop breast cancer are twice as likely to die as insured women with the same diagnosis. Uninsured men are nearly twice as likely as insured men to be diagnosed at a late stage of colon cancer. The consequences of being uninsured are clear for children as well. Uninsured children are four times more likely than their insured peers to go without needed dental care; four-and-a-half times more likely to do without needed prescription medicines or eyeglasses; and more than one-and-a-half times more likely to be missing some or all of their immunizations. This is simply unacceptable for a nation as great as ours.

Many in health philanthropy have worked long and hard to solve this problem through valuable and effective foundation-funded studies; demonstration and policy development projects; support for "safety-net" institutions and volunteer programs; and educational efforts, including campaigns to enroll uninsured children and adults in public programs.

Yet the problem persists and is growing worse. Health philanthropies of every size are working hard to improve the situation, but the problem demands a broad societal response, involving the private, public, and voluntary sectors. In short, the problem is bigger than any of us individually, and we need to join forces to generate a productive, nonpartisan, national debate on how to solve this problem once and for all. Health philanthropies in every community can lead the way, and we hope that you will join this national effort.

COVER THE UNINSURED WEEK

In an effort to bring the issue of the uninsured to the forefront of our nation's agenda, nearly a dozen health philanthropies and many of the most influential organizations in the United States have come together to sponsor *Cover the Uninsured Week*. This unprecedented series of national and local events will take place March 10 through March 16, 2003. *Cover the Uninsured Week* is a major effort to establish the issue of the uninsured as a top national priority and to encourage our nation to seek solutions for the more than 41 million Americans who have no health insurance. We are gratified that former Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter are honorary co-chairs of this important, nonpartisan effort. We are delighted that Hollywood writers for dramatic TV shows such as *Law & Order SVU* have committed to including stories about the uninsured in their shows that week.

Cover the Uninsured Week will kick off with a national event in Washington, DC, on March 5, 2003. Following the national event, a week of well-publicized events will take place in communities across the nation, with a professional organizing staff working on the ground in more than 25 communities. Each event will feature a different constituency – including health care providers, health and medical education groups, business and labor organizations, religious leaders, consumer groups, and advocacy organizations – and will highlight that constituency's perspective and role in relation to the issue of the uninsured.

The following activities are being proposed for *Cover the Uninsured Week*:

- **Monday: Town Hall Meetings.** *Cover the Uninsured Week* will begin on Monday, March 10, with the signing of a proclamation by a local or state elected official of the executive branch, such as a governor or mayor. The proclamation signing will be followed by a town hall meeting bringing together local, state, and federal elected officials; representatives from local *Cover the Uninsured Week* organizations; the uninsured; the public; and the media to talk about the issue of the uninsured.
- **Tuesday: On Campus.** Medical, dental, public health, and nursing schools will conduct large, campus-wide teaching events about the plight of the uninsured and will present proposals on how to expand health coverage.
- **Wednesday: Health Fairs.** Physicians, nurses, hospitals, community health centers, dentists, and clinics will provide free health screenings and services. Enrollment for eligible uninsured adults and children in public health coverage programs such as SCHIP and Medicaid will also be available. Activities will take place throughout the day to accommodate the schedules of working families.
- **Thursday: Business and Labor.** Local leaders from business and labor organizations will gather to highlight the joint interest of business and labor in making certain that all Americans have access to affordable health coverage.
- **Friday – Sunday: Interfaith Events.** Friday morning interfaith prayer breakfasts for religious leaders will be organized. In many communities, weekend services will focus on the plight of the uninsured.

Cover the Uninsured Week is being supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The California Endowment, the Missouri Foundation For Health, The United Hospital Fund of New York, The George Gund Foundation, and the Jewish Healthcare Foundation of Pittsburgh. The campaign will use educational materials produced by The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation on the issue of the uninsured. The week is also supported by diverse national organizations, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, AFL-CIO, The Business Roundtable, Service Employees International Union, Healthcare Leadership Council, American Medical Association, American Nurses Association, Health Insurance Association of America, Families USA, Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, American Hospital Association, Federation of American Hospitals, Catholic Health Association of the United States, AARP, and United Way of America.

This coalition of supporters is unprecedented, as is the lead role philanthropies have taken in this initiative. Yet the success of *Cover the Uninsured Week* depends upon the willingness of many more organizations all across the country to get involved in a variety of ways.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRANTMAKERS

Cover the Uninsured Week offers grantmakers a comprehensive, coordinated way to propel the issue of the uninsured to the forefront of the national agenda. Here are just a few of the ways to get involved:

- **Participate nationally in the campaign.** The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has committed resources to the campaign for research, national advertising, and creating a national grassroots staff of more than 100. Other foundations, organizations, businesses, and individuals can enhance the nationwide effort by contributing financially to the campaign. Opportunities for involvement include funding specific events or activities, such as outreach to faith-based communities or the engagement of the entertainment and arts communities.
- **Support local activities.** Local grantmakers are committing resources to fund activities in communities from coast to coast. Additional contributions from foundations, businesses, organizations, and individuals will allow the campaign to expand local efforts and even expand the number of communities in which the campaign will be active with paid staff on the ground.
- **Mobilize your grantees.** Foundations can promote *Cover the Uninsured Week* to their grantees and encourage them to support events nationally and locally.

We are encouraging organizations all across the country to take an active role in supporting this important national effort. United, we can increase grassroots support for the issue of the uninsured across the nation, generate extensive media coverage, and communicate the importance of solving this problem to leaders in every sector of American society. Please join us.

Foundations interested in taking part in *Cover the Uninsured Week* should contact Alison Betty Volz, organizational outreach director, at 202.572.2886. For more information, or to order free materials, visit www.CoverTheUninsuredWeek.org.

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VIEWS FROM THE FIELD is offered by GIH as a forum for health grantmakers to share insights and experiences. If you are interested in participating, please contact Angela Saunders, GIH's communications manager, at 202.452.8331 or asaunders@gih.org.