

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**The Tri-County's Answer to a Growing Uninsured Problem:
Tri-County Project Care, Inc.**

Tri-County Project Care, Inc is the community's answer to a growing uninsured problem. After a year of planning and preparation, Tri-County Project Care (TCPC) will open its pilot program to provide quality, affordable healthcare to some eligible employed, uninsured residents of Berkeley, Dorchester and Charleston counties.

Initiated by the Charleston County Medical Society, an organization comprised of over one thousand physicians practicing in Charleston County, the program's launch is a result of the funding and active participation of area hospitals, federal clinics, physicians, and healthcare organizations currently serving the uninsured.

"We are confident that the year spent planning for our opening will ensure the program's ability to make a positive impact on our community's grave uninsured situation," says Casey Fitts, MD, TCPC Medical Director. "Clearly, the system currently in place is broken."

"Statistics depicting both the state of South Carolina and the tri-county uninsured plight are the barometer gauging that it is indeed time for a program such as Tri-County Project Care," continues Fitts.

The Problem

- Estimated 100,000 plus residents with no health insurance in 2000
- Increased cost shifted to 35% of population with commercial insurance
- Escalating cost incurred by hospitals through the Emergency Room bad dept/charity care
- 4 of 5 uninsured adults live in families headed by a full- or part-time worker
- The nationwide percentage of people without insurance fell from 16.3 percent to 15.5 percent last year, the percentage of the uninsured grew in South Carolina, from 15.5 percent to 17.6 percent
- The working poor is the fastest growing segment of the uninsured population
- 30% of the full-time employed population is without benefits through their work site. An unaccounted for number of employed in multiple part-time jobs have no benefits.
- Hospitalization costs of patient who have forgone ongoing treatment of health conditions exceeds the cost of a physician's visit
- The majority of the new jobs created are lower-wage industries without benefits
- 60% of uninsured misuse the Emergency Room as primary care provider
- Area hospitals estimate 135,000 uninsured encounters equate to a 50 million

dollar annual combined loss

- DHEC and Federal Health Centers estimate 25,000 uninsured encounters equate to approximately 2.5 million in dollars lost annually
- The 10 leading causes of deaths in SC account for 80% of deaths and can be avoided with regular check ups and prevention

The Answer

Tri-County Project Care, Inc. will initially enroll patients with the following qualifications:

- Resident of the tri-county
- Without access to subsidized insurance
- Employed
- Adults ages 19-64
- Income within 125% - 200% of the federal poverty level

Tri-County Project Care, Inc. will provide the following:

1. A referral center for all uninsured in the tri-county area.

Social workers will help link applicants to available resources for quality, affordable health care.

2. A network of participating providers caring for the eligible uninsured at an affordable price.

The TCPC program joins together the area's medical services for the purpose of providing better care for those without insurance. The participating providers have funded the program and/or are giving of their services at a discounted rate.

3. Comprehensive health care services with limited cost to the working uninsured adult.

On a limited income, TCPC understands that the health care needs of the working uninsured may go unmet due to the lack of money to cover costly care. The program offers those eligible patients a medical home and health care services within their means.

4. The first step toward a healthier community.

Health care providers in all three counties agreed to fulfill Dr. Fitts' prescription for creating a healthy program for the uninsured. In response they formed a network of participating providers to care for the eligible uninsured at an affordable price.

“This is not the staff of Tri-County Project Care’s program, it is the community’s program,” explains Joe Chambers, MD, MPH, TCPC Executive Director. “We recognized that taking that first step toward a healthier community meant creating an umbrella organization for all resources available for the uninsured.”

“It is a milestone to see the area hospitals, physicians, clinics, and related healthcare organizations who serve the uninsured population come together for this common cause.”

Participating providers and funders* include:

Medical Society of South Carolina*
Franklin C. Fetter Clinics, Inc.
University Medical Associates
McClellan-Banks Clinic
DHEC Trident Health District
United Physicians
Thomas Cooper and Associates
Sea Island Medical Center
St. James – Santee Health Center
Medical University of South Carolina*
CareAlliance Health Services*
East Cooper Regional Medical Center*
Trident Health System*
Charleston County*

Community needs assessments uncovered a particularly high area of need within the low-income populations and members of the working poor. “At present, programs are provided to aid low income residents without insurance in finding affordable access to care,” says Chambers. “Conversely, there are no programs reaching out to meet the needs of the growing number of employed individuals in low wage jobs without access to insurance.”

Large firms saw their healthcare costs increase by 12.8 % in 2001. Small firms can not maintain the costs of escalating healthcare premiums and either shift more cost to the employee or opt to discontinue healthcare benefits altogether. “With no sign of relief for rising healthcare costs to the employer combined with an increase in low wage jobs without benefits, it is critical that the working poor have access to an alternative for quality healthcare,” says Fitts.

“Ultimately, the Tri-County Project Care vision is to incrementally expand our pilot program to serve all uninsured residents of Berkeley, Dorchester and Charleston counties over the next five years.”

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