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Health Access America Seeks to Link Columbia's Uninsured with Coverage

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The rising number of uninsured Americans represents the most important health care issue facing our nation today. A high number of Americans without health insurance affects national productivity, the health of our society, our health care infrastructure and the cost of health care to everyone.

Action on this issue is essential both on the public policy front as well as helping people better understand and access existing health coverage options. Although the number of uninsured Americans is rising, there is no persistent, yearlong national effort to press for action in Washington or to link individuals and families with existing private and public coverage options.

Health Access America (HAA), a national campaign supported by the Healthcare Leadership Council (HLC), is making a concerted effort locally to link Columbia's uninsured with insurance coverage. In 2001, HLC initiated its first HAA campaign that had a major impact in changing public understanding regarding the face of the uninsured. HLC-commissioned research discovered that eight of every 10 uninsured Americans live in a wage-earning household.

This year, HAA is being re-engaged forming a broader coalition of groups with resources available to both impact public policy and provide much-needed information to the millions of uninsured Americans. Locally, HAA will advocate bipartisan public policy measures that will increase the accessibility of private health coverage and improve the efficacy of existing public programs.

Two key points will remain a constant thread of the HAA campaign:

1. the problem of the uninsured affects all Americans and must be addressed;
2. private and public coverage options are available for a significant number of Columbia's uninsured and a proactive effort is essential to ensure that as many eligible people as possible are linked with the available plans and programs.

A proactive effort is essential to ensure that as many people as possible are linked with plans and programs. A non-partisan, non-profit organization, the HAA is seeking to partner with local organizations and businesses to create community awareness regarding the rising number of uninsured individuals that affects everyone locally and maximize insurance enrollment for those who are eligible and are simply uninsured and unaware that they had options.

Health Access America will work with local partners to increase public knowledge regarding the value of insurance and opportunities for coverage through various methods including grass roots community outreach, advocacy, education, research and polling.

"We are very excited to bring this program to Columbia," said John Bayalis, Health Access America national field organizer. "This is a great opportunity for HLC to continue its effort to help those without insurance find the right plan and get the coverage they need."

Health Access America will kick off its community outreach at the Project HOPE/Teen Health Center 2nd Annual Health Fair on Saturday, April 21 at the Wiley Kennedy Family Life Center of Bethlehem Baptist Church (1028 Eastman Street). Everyone in the community is invited to come out and learn more about HAA from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Participants can also participate in free health screenings, fitness activities and nutrition workshops from various other exhibitors.

For more information regarding partnering with Health Access America and strengthening the quest to reduce the number of uninsured Columbia residents, please call (404) 885-9596 x24.

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