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## Health Access opens Monday

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**THE SAGINAW NEWS**

Many uninsured Saginawians qualify for health care, an advocate says, but enrolling them is another story.

The nonprofit Health Access America's Saginaw County office will open inside the Saginaw County Department of Public Health, 1600 N. Michigan, at 9 a.m. Monday.

"Some of the barriers that prevent families from enrolling, for Latino families, are language barriers," said spokesman Mike Nowlin. "There are also knowledge barriers. They don't know how to get on the Internet and fill out applications online. We will have a person to help them enroll."

A staff person will work with the Saginaw County Health Department to plan events throughout the year, Nowlin said. The group wants to work with public schools as well as with the business community, "especially employers that don't offer health insurance to workers," Nowlin said.

Saginaw County is one of seven communities nationwide -- and the only one in the state -- taking part in the Washington, D.C.-based Healthcare Leadership Council. The goal is to help find insurance for 1,000 Saginaw County residents who have no coverage by Tuesday, July 31.

With more than 30,000 uninsured people in Saginaw County, says Nowlin, plans to enroll a tenth of that number are the first order of business.

Saginaw Health Plan is a nonprofit group the County Health Department, Covenant HealthCare and St. Mary's of Michigan hospital support. They recently helped launch Tri-Share, an effort to offset the cost small businesses face in providing health care. The plan divides health care costs -- \$53 a month -- among employer, employee and Saginaw Health Plan. Tri-Share is one component of the pilot Health Access America operation.

"It's part and parcel," Nowlin said. "Think of it this way: Health Access America is like an umbrella. Underneath that are a number of health insurance packages available in Saginaw County."

Linda Hamacher is executive director of Saginaw Health Plan, which provides the subsidy to employers through Tri-Share. There are 26 county Health Plans covering most of the counties in Michigan, she said, including Genesee and Bay.

"Lots of times, it just takes organization of information and innovative ways to get information directly to employers," Hamacher said. "By Health Access America having an office there, it is such an advantage." v

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