

The Fraying Safety Net Our Neighbors at Risk

Clare Coleman, President & CEO

Four out of five uninsured Americans are in working families: 70% live in households with a full-time worker and 12% with a part-time worker.

Nearly three in ten adults (28%) report a time in the past year when they did not have enough money to pay for medical or health care.

Nearly three in ten adults (29%) report delaying or skipping needed health care because of cost.

One-fifth of American women of reproductive age are uninsured, and the proportion doubles for those who are below the federal poverty level.

For more information on this data, visit www.guttmacher.org and www.kff.org/kaiserpolls.



Planned Parenthood Mid-Hudson Valley has a 73-year tradition of care for the underserved and vulnerable in our community, and we are proud to be part of the regional safety net for our neighbors.

Like many organizations that serve low-income and underserved communities, we often face challenging times. This year, Planned Parenthoods across the state are facing significant financial hardships brought on by declining patient visits and increased costs.

Our challenges are part of a larger struggle. **The health care system seems increasingly broken and capricious – more and more of our neighbors are working without health benefits, or with such expensive or inadequate benefits that they can't truly get care.**

President Bush vetoed legislation that would continue the State Children's Health Insurance Program, a ten-year-old program that provides health coverage to children in families with incomes too high to receive Medicaid but too low to afford private insurance. The program has provided coverage to approximately six million children and some adults. The bill vetoed by the President would have increased funds by \$35 billion, allowing an estimated 3.8 million new children to be covered.

This veto puts the State of New York in conflict with the federal government. Governor Eliot Spitzer has sought federal approval to expand New York's program to children in families with annual incomes less than 400% of the poverty level. This would effectively cover all children in the state. But the Bush Administration has blocked New York and other states from this kind of expansion, and New York has now joined a lawsuit against the federal government over this issue, which affects about 60,000 children under 19 in our state.

There are other roadblocks for low-income people seeking health care. Last summer, new federal regulations went into effect requiring anyone seeking medical coverage through Medicaid to prove their legal U.S. citizenship, with a passport or original, certified birth certificate. Many low-income people do not have access

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to either document and now are blocked from receiving subsidized care at Planned Parenthoods, hospitals and safety-net providers nationwide.

Only Planned Parenthood, however, has had the special distinction of being targeted by name in Congress for de-funding. A Congressional vote this summer to prohibit Planned Parenthood from participating in federal family planning programs failed by only 12 votes.

As you can imagine, Planned Parenthood has been feeling embattled this year. We have worked hard to keep the focus on patient care and education, because when our society does not take steps to cover the needy among us, the risks and burdens on our patients rises. **This year, we have found that a significant number of our low-income patients have not been coming in for care.**

With the economy slowing, our patients -- the majority of whom are young adults under age 24 -- may be less able to afford health care, and will postpone or go without the kind of health services we provide. We have been very concerned that this may lead to serious health impacts for them.

For example, when faced with an unintended pregnancy, **poor women are five times as likely as more affluent women to have an unplanned birth**, and that choice can have serious consequences for both the woman and her family.

While in the last dozen years contraceptive use fell slightly among all women who are sexually active and able to become pregnant, the decline among low-income women was larger, from 92% to 86%. Consistent use of a contraceptive method is essential if our goal is to prevent unintended pregnancies and abortions. **The 11% of at-risk women who do not use contraception account for half of all unplanned pregnancies.**

That's why, especially in tough economic times, **Planned Parenthood Mid-Hudson Valley must remain fully committed to those who turn to us for confidential, quality and caring health services.**

We continue to reach out throughout the four counties we serve, through visits to cooperative extensions, BOCES, Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, daycare centers, social service providers, and teen programs both in and outside schools. We have been in touch with safe homes for survivors of domestic violence, affordable housing programs, and care centers for the developmentally disabled. We have even dropped by local businesses, like hair and nail salons, to make sure people in need know we're here for them. On our website, www.ppmhv.org, you can find coupons for reduced fees and applications for subsidized programs.

We appreciate your support among our neighbors, and all that the community has done to help our patients over the years. Our staff and Board of Directors, drawn from Dutchess, Orange, Sullivan and Ulster counties, continue to focus on both fiscal responsibility and preserving our historic commitment to serving those who are most vulnerable in our communities. We won't give up on the effort to bring services to people who need them. And we know you'll be there for us.

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