

**Meriden**

# Access to Care program aims to help the uninsured

By Steven Scarpa  
Record-Journal staff

**MERIDEN** — More than 45 million people in the United States went without health insurance in 2003, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. About eight million of those people are children. Ten percent of Connecticut's population goes without basic health insurance.

With the number of uninsured people reaching critical proportions, the Community Health Center's Access to Care program is a way for those people to get the medical assistance they need without bankrupting themselves in the process. To that end, the center celebrated "Cover the Uninsured Week" last week, hoping to raise awareness that there is help for people without insurance.

"It costs a tremendous amount to have people be uninsured," said Mark Masselli, president of the CHC, which has clinics in Meriden, Middletown, Old Saybrook, Clinton, New Britain, New London and Groton. Meriden's facility, located on State Street, serves 10,000 people — approximately 20 percent of the city's population.

The problem is striking the country's minority populations particularly hard. Approximately 33 percent of the country's Hispanic population go without health insurance. Nineteen percent of African-Americans don't have health insurance, as opposed to 14 percent of whites, according to U.S. Census statistics.

Medicare provides for the elderly and the Medicaid for the destitute,

**"It costs a tremendous amount to have people be uninsured."**

— Community Health Center President Mark Masselli

but the truly lost segment of the population are those who have "nothing plus a dollar," Masselli said.

It is these people CHC is desperately trying to reach. Uninsured families can lose their life savings if they are faced with a severe illness. "They have three jobs. We provide care for a lot of people who work for small businesses of under 25 people that can't afford to provide insurance," Masselli said.

In addition to providing what they believe to be top-flight health care on a sliding fee scale, Access to Care coordinators are made available to sign people up for relief programs that they might be available for. "Maybe people don't realize that if you have children you might be eligible for the state HUSKY health care program. We'll sign you up," Masselli said.

Sue Greeno, CHC's eligibility/outreach coordinator, said that health issues among the uninsured tend to magnify. Since they can't afford preventative care, simple illnesses can often spiral out of

control into far more debilitating, and expensive, medical problems. "Our main purpose is to connect people with a medical home and other health care resources," Greeno said.

Masselli believes the issue of the federal government providing universal health care offers no easy answers. Questions like determining who would be eligible for universal health care, and more importantly, who would pay for it all, bedevil policymakers. "We try to serve everyone at the level that they need our help," he said.

For more information about Meriden's Community Health Center, call 237-2229.

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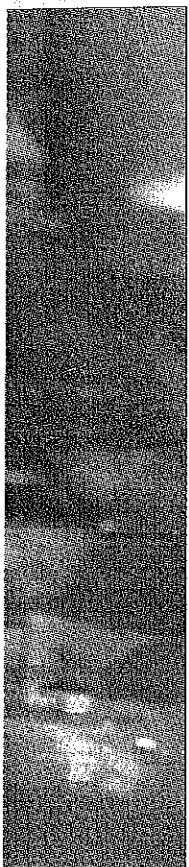
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