

# CoverThe UninsuredWeek

March 10-16, 2003

## **WHAT IS COVER THE UNINSURED WEEK?**

Building on the momentum generated by the February 2002 launch of the *Covering the Uninsured* educational and advertising campaign and Web site, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and some of the most influential organizations in the United States will cosponsor *Cover the Uninsured Week*. This unprecedented weeklong series of national and local activities will take place from Monday, March 10, through Sunday, March 16, 2003, in an effort to sensitize the public and opinion leaders to the plight of the more than 41 million Americans who lack health insurance.

## **THE GOALS OF COVER THE UNINSURED WEEK ARE TO:**

- ▶ Raise public awareness of the plight of more than 41 million uninsured Americans.
- ▶ Demonstrate broad support for action on the issue.
- ▶ Generate significant media attention to the issue, both nationally and in key communities across the country.
- ▶ Encourage other national organizations to join The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and 15 partner organizations in an effort to increase attention to the issue.
- ▶ Create a single rallying point for groups and individuals working to extend health care coverage to the uninsured.

## **WHO IS SPONSORING IT?**

*Cover the Uninsured Week* is sponsored by two health foundations, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The California Endowment, as well as a diverse array of national organizations that have worked for the past three years to educate the public and national leaders about the uninsured. The organizations include: the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, AFL-CIO, The Business Roundtable, Service Employees International Union, Healthcare Leadership Council, American Medical Association, American Nurses Association, Health Insurance Association of America, Families USA, Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, American Hospital Association, Federation of American Hospitals, Catholic Health Association of the United States, AARP and United Way of America.

Before *Cover the Uninsured Week* is launched, additional foundations, national and local sponsors and supporters will join the effort.

The organizers of *Cover the Uninsured Week* will work to involve national leaders, including elected officials and celebrities, whose support will focus the nation on the urgency of this problem. Former Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter have already agreed to serve as Honorary Co-Chairs of this unique, nonpartisan project.

## **WHY SHOULD I GET INVOLVED?**

More than 41 million Americans are uninsured and their numbers are growing as the economy weakens. The problem of the uninsured is one of America's biggest health challenges. Too many families do not have access to affordable health insurance, and they live sicker and die younger as a result. And being uninsured is not just a problem for the unemployed. Eight out of 10 uninsured Americans are in working families. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Next March, *Cover the Uninsured Week* will help bring the issue of the uninsured to the forefront of our national agenda. The success of *Cover the Uninsured Week* depends upon the willingness of organizations all across the country—organizations like yours—to come together around the issue of the uninsured and plan activities in communities from coast to coast. With your help, we can increase grassroots support for this issue throughout the country, generate extensive media coverage, and communicate the importance of solving this problem to leaders of every sector of American society. A minimal investment of your organization's time and resources can go a long way to help the more than 41 million Americans get the medical attention they need and deserve.

## **WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES ARE BEING PLANNED?**

*Cover the Uninsured Week* will launch with a national event in Washington, D.C., followed by a week of events in communities across the country. Each event will highlight different constituencies—including business and labor organizations, health care providers, health and medical education groups, religious leaders, consumer groups, the arts and entertainment industry, and advocacy organizations—and their unique perspectives and roles in relation to the problems facing Americans who do not have health insurance.

## **THE FOLLOWING ARE THE ACTIVITIES BEING PROPOSED FOR THE DAYS THAT COMPRISE COVER THE UNINSURED WEEK.**

- ▶ **Monday: *Cover the Uninsured Week* – Town Hall Meetings.** *Cover the Uninsured Week* will launch on Monday, March 10, with the issuance of a proclamation by a local or state elected official at a community-wide town hall meeting. The proclamation signing will be followed by a town hall meeting that will bring together in one place local, state and federal elected officials; representatives from local *Cover the Uninsured Week* organizations; the uninsured; the public; and the media to talk about the issue of the uninsured. This event will serve as a platform for highlighting the national *Cover the Uninsured Week* effort and announcing this week's local activities to the media and the general public.
- ▶ **Tuesday: *Cover the Uninsured Week* – On Campus.** Medical, dental, public health, and nursing schools will conduct large, school-wide teaching events about the plight of the uninsured and will present discussions of various ways to expand health coverage.
- ▶ **Wednesday: *Cover the Uninsured Week* – Health Fairs.** Physicians, nurses, hospitals, community health centers, dentists and clinics will provide free health screenings and services, and enrollment for eligible uninsured families and children into public health coverage programs such as SCHIP and Medicaid. Activities will take place throughout the day to accommodate the schedules of working families.
- ▶ **Thursday: *Cover the Uninsured Week* – Business & Labor.** Local leaders from business and labor organizations will gather together to highlight the joint interest of business and labor in making certain that all Americans have access to affordable health coverage. Presentations to business associations and labor groups will highlight the common interest of these constituencies in solving the problem of the uninsured, while allowing each to showcase their respective approaches.
- ▶ **Friday-Sunday: *Cover the Uninsured Week* – Interfaith Events.** Friday morning interfaith prayer breakfasts for religious leaders will be organized. In addition, individual faith leaders in specific congregations will encourage their congregants to reflect and act on the moral imperative to help the uninsured. In many involved communities, weekend services will focus on the plight of the uninsured and conclude the activities of the week.

*Cover the Uninsured Week* is also conducting outreach to motion picture, music and television celebrities, as well as the arts and entertainment industry to ask for their help in raising awareness about the issue.

## HOW DID THIS EFFORT GET STARTED?

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The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and national partner organizations have already sponsored important events, meetings and campaigns to help raise awareness of the problem of the uninsured. Some of these activities include:

- ▶ **Health Coverage 2000** – Held in Washington, D.C. in January 2000, Health Coverage 2000 was a national conference in which eight original partner organizations presented specific proposals for decreasing the number of uninsured Americans.
- ▶ **Regional conferences** – Between November 2000 and January 2001, seven meetings were held across the country in which local representatives from national organizations shared the stage with uninsured residents and federal, state and local officials to discuss proposals for extending health care coverage to the uninsured.
- ▶ **Satellite town hall meetings** – During March 2001, meetings were held at more than 300 hospital sites across the United States. A moderated debate among members of Congress was downlinked to each location, and discussions took place at each site.
- ▶ **Covering the Uninsured advertising campaign** – A national advertising campaign designed to raise the issue of the uninsured in the consciousness of America's opinion leaders was launched in February 2002 and is ongoing.

## MORE ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF THE UNINSURED IN THE UNITED STATES

According to the latest Census Bureau report, there were more than 41 million uninsured Americans in the year 2001. Eight out of 10 were in working families. In most cases, the main earners in these families either had jobs that offered no health coverage or their premiums were unaffordable.

Because uninsured Americans cannot afford needed medical care, they live sicker and die younger than Americans with health coverage. For example:

- ▶ Uninsured women who develop breast cancer are twice as likely to die than insured women with the same diagnosis.
- ▶ Uninsured men are nearly twice as likely to be diagnosed at a late stage of colon cancer than insured men.
- ▶ Uninsured children who need medical or surgical care are four times more likely to go without care than insured children with the same needs.
- ▶ Uninsured children are almost five times more likely to be unable to receive needed dental care.
- ▶ Uninsured children are four-and-one-half times more likely to do without needed prescription medicines or eyeglasses.
- ▶ Uninsured children are more than one-and-one-half times more likely to be missing some or all of their immunizations.

The number of uninsured Americans is rising for several reasons:

- ▶ First, the economy has slowed and more people are unemployed and without health coverage.
- ▶ Second, health care costs are rising at double-digit annual rates, making health coverage increasingly unaffordable for employers as well as individual consumers.
- ▶ Third, as states experience fiscal shortfalls, they are cutting back on public health coverage programs, such as Medicaid, causing some low-income families to lose health coverage.

Given these trends, the problem of the uninsured promises to grow worse, not better, in the coming years.

**For more information, contact (202) 572-2928 or go to [CoverTheUninsuredWeek.org](http://CoverTheUninsuredWeek.org).**