

NEWS STATEMENT
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Statement attributable to:
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**New Medicaid Enrollment Numbers Highlight the
Importance of Health Care in Good Times and Bad**

DENVER— The state's announcement May 15 of the growth in Medicaid enrollment highlights the need for public health coverage during a time of economic upheaval. As more people lose their jobs, they often lose their health insurance coverage, if their employers were able to offer it in the first place. In some cases, employers must cut health insurance coverage in order to keep their doors open. It is important for individuals and families to be able to continue to get the health care they need while they seek new employment and the economic upheaval runs its course.

Colorado's Community Health Centers (CHCs) collectively serve one-third of the low-income uninsured, one-third of Medicaid patients, and one-third of Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+) patients in Colorado. The economic downturn is increasing demand on CHCs across the state. In 2008, CHCs cared for nearly 18,000 more patients than in 2007.

- Demand has been growing steadily since October of 2008.
- Some CHCs reported in January that visits by the uninsured are up as much as 41 percent when comparing patient utilization in late 2008 with the same time period in 2007.
- Medicaid visits for the same time period are up between 15-23 percent at some Health Centers.
- Other CHCs without capacity for new patients have seen increases in their waiting lists for primary care, mental health services and dental care.
 - One Health Center established a waiting list for mental health services in November that had grown to 150 individuals by January
 - Another Health Center has more than 1,800 people on their wait list.

The increased demand is no surprise. CHCs are located in high need areas of the state (lower income populations with fewer doctors and nurses) – areas that are likely to be hard hit by the recession.

Even before the economic downturn was in full swing, Colorado had an estimated 800,000 uninsured people. Community Health Centers receive some of their funding from the federal government specifically to be able to help uninsured people, and for the short term, the economic stimulus dollars are helping CHCs address the growing number of patients. However, the need is greater than CHCs can meet alone. They are working hard to care for their communities, working with other health care providers, and hiring additional health care providers and build or expand exam rooms when funding is available.

The growing numbers of people who are uninsured and who are eligible for Medicaid show the importance of addressing the shortcomings of the health care system. When the loss of health care coverage is just a paycheck away, and the consequences of that loss can be long term and life-changing, then the health care system needs more than just tinkering. It needs the work of all of us – government, industry, and individuals—to reform health care to meet our communities' needs.

To interview Mr. Brooks, please contact Polly Anderson at (303) 861-5165, Ext. 246, or polly@cchn.org. To view the news release with current Medicaid enrollment numbers from the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Finance, please go to <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite?blobcol=urldata&blobheader=application%2Fpdf&blobkey=id&blobtable=MungoBlobs&blobwhere=1239161522486&ssbinary=true>.

The Colorado Community Health Network (CCHN) is the collective voice for Colorado's 15 Community Health Centers (CHCs) and their patients. CHCs provide a health care home to more than 500,000 of their community members - one in 10 people in Colorado - from 54 of the state's 64 counties. Without CHCs, hundreds of thousands of Colorado's low-income families and individuals would have no regular source of health care. CCHN's mission is to increase access to high quality health care for people in need in Colorado. For more information about CCHN, please visit www.cchn.org.

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