



MEDIA RELEASE

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Georgia Watch Report: The Cost of Care

Watchdog group publishes report on high cost of health care for uninsured and underinsured

ATLANTA- Today Georgia Watch released a report detailing the plight of the uninsured and underinsured when seeking affordable health care in the state. Titled *The Cost of Care in Georgia*, the report examines overcharging of uninsured patients at nonprofit hospitals, along with the economic repercussions of medical debt and how it directly causes foreclosure and financial ruin. In terms of potential solutions to the issue of affordability, the report evaluates programs across the state that treat the uninsured for less.

Georgia has the sixth-highest number of residents without health insurance in the US and only one in five individuals living below the poverty level in Georgia have private insurance. Currently, more than half of all bankruptcies in the US are the result of medical debt.

“While no one is immune from this threat of financial devastation, our uninsured and underinsured consumers are often most susceptible to the ill effects of high health care costs,” **Hospital Accountability Project Manager Holly Lang said.**

The Cost of Care profiles the state’s uninsured patients, highlighting areas with the greatest concentration of vulnerable populations. For example, numbers from metro Atlanta illustrate that significant portions of the population live without health insurance:

- 30 percent of Clayton County’s nonelderly adults had no insurance;
- 28 percent nonelderly adults are without coverage in DeKalb County;
- 26.5 percent of Gwinnett County’s nonelderly adults had no insurance; and,
- 19.3 percent of Cobb County nonelderly adults had no coverage.

The report also examines the true cost of care in the state, concluding that many of the state’s hospitals overcharge. No matter the patient, whether they have adequate, inadequate or no insurance whatsoever, the price tag for services remains high. In Georgia, the average emergency room visit costs \$1,500, as compared to the average clinic visit of \$29 and an average primary care doctor visit that can range from \$75 to \$120.

“As it stands, both insured and underinsured consumers are left to fend for themselves when it comes to high health care bills,” **Lang said.** “We need hospital executives, community leaders and the consumers themselves to come together to help fight what is increasingly a crisis of care.”

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Some community-based initiatives throughout Georgia have begun to address the issue of health care affordability for the uninsured and underinsured consumers in their respective regions. For example, East Georgia Health Cooperative and Collective Health Works in Central Georgia have built strong coalitions that include hospitals, clinics and local and statewide government entities to assist in treating the uninsured in their respective communities.

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“The Cost of Care in Georgia” is part of an ongoing series of reports released through the Hospital Accountability Project (HAP), a program of Georgia Watch that examines the challenges of low-income, uninsured and underinsured when attempting to access affordable health care. HAP also examines current public policies in regards to financial assistance for medically uninsured and underinsured consumers. Visit <http://atlantaHAP.org> for more information.

Georgia Watch is the state’s leading, nonprofit, nonpartisan consumer advocacy group. We examine the issues of health care, identity theft, energy efficiency and predatory lending, as they relate to consumers across the state. Visit www.georgiawatch.org for more information.