



Pick Your Path to Health

Health Care Access: Your Health Matters

You read and hear a lot of information on how to stay healthy: get plenty of exercise, eat more fruits and vegetables, drink lots of water, and get regular physical checkups. You also know that it is important to get a yearly mammogram and Pap smear, as well as having your cholesterol and blood pressure checked regularly. However, knowing what you need to do and being able to get it done can be difficult if you don't have health insurance. And, you're not alone. Almost 20 percent of all African American women do not have health insurance coverage at all

"Having health insurance matters," says Jennifer L. Howse, president of the March of Dimes. "Studies have shown that the uninsured are in poorer health, are less likely to have a usual source of medical care, and more likely to delay or go without needed health care services."

Most women get their health insurance from their job, if it is offered. But what if your employer doesn't offer it or you can't afford it because you have an entire family to cover? There are programs available that can help you get the care you need.

Getting the Care You Need

Mabel Fowler is a senior citizen who has lived in the heart of Washington, D.C. for more than 50 years. She has always had a low income and used to work as a "day worker" or housekeeper when she was raising her two children by herself. Her job didn't offer benefits or health insurance of any kind. But Mabel kept herself and her family healthy by getting her children immunized and taking them for regular checkups to a doctor or community clinic. She and her family were enrolled in the Medicaid program. Medicaid is a government program that provides health coverage for low-income families. "I thought it was fine. It covered doctors, hospitals, and prescriptions. We got everything we needed," Mabel recalls.

Now that Mabel is over 65, she has health coverage under another government program, Medicare. "I have high blood pressure and an enlarged heart. I have to take four different kinds of medicines and get a checkup every few months," she says. Medicare is the senior citizens health program that helps them get health coverage at a reduced cost

through deductions on their social security check. "They pay so much and you pay the rest. You can go to any doctor or hospital," she says.

Making Community Work: Knowing What's Available

In addition to public health insurance, there are many low-cost community health resources, including free health screenings. Finding out what's out there in your neighborhood and when to take advantage of it is important to making sure you have access to the kind of health care you need.

Did you know?

- Almost all states and cities have special programs and screenings available to uninsured people.
- Local hospitals, health departments, and clinics often sponsor free community health fairs.
- There are also many traveling health screening services such as mammovans that offer mammograms and go to many different locations to make it easier to access these services.
- Neighborhood or school-based clinics usually provide basic health services to uninsured adults and children at a low cost.
- Dental schools often offer reduced rate services.
- Neighborhood grocery stores or supermarkets frequently have screenings for diabetes or offer seasonal low-cost flu shots.
- All hospitals have some money under the Hill-Burton Act to provide care to individuals with no health insurance.
- Every state has a program to provide eligible children 18 years and younger with free or low-cost health insurance. [This may be an option if you have health insurance through your job, but have a low income and cannot afford it for your children.] To learn more, call Insure Kids Now Program at 1-877-KIDS-NOW.

A Matter of Health for Life

Here are some steps to take to learn about health services in your community:

- Call your local health department about special programs for low-cost or no-cost health services. Ask them about low-cost dental services or referrals to dental clinics, as well as any upcoming health fairs, screenings, etc. To find your local health department, check the yellow pages under local, municipal, or county government

- section, or you may want to call the mayor's office to ask for the information.
- Call your local hospitals about any upcoming health fairs, screenings, and inquire about whether they have financial assistance for people with no health insurance.
 - Call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program for information on free or low-cost screening services and where they are in your community.
 - If you can get health insurance through your employer but cannot afford it for your entire family, check out the Insure Kids Now program or ask your state health department about their programs for children.
 - If you need mental health services, try your local church and ask if they have a pastoral counseling program or know of a church that does. You can also contact your local health department or call the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and ask for information on services offered in your community mental health center. National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, www. <http://www.nami.org/>, 1-800-950-NAMI [6264]
 - Ask your local supermarket if they will be holding any health fairs or special health programs during the upcoming year.
 - Ask your local pharmacy if they have free health care information or information on low-cost or free screenings or services.
 - If you are pregnant, contact your local health department for special programs they may have for pregnant women. Many states offer free prenatal services for you and your baby.

Women, no matter what age or income, can get on a path to better health by finding out what services are out there and by taking advantage of them. Just ask Mabel Fowler. "I had to do what I had to do. There's much more out there now than when I first moved here. You can get just about anything you need done . . . I like to go to the doctors at the hospital because I can see the doctor I want to see and they don't mind if you talk back to them. I don't have no complaints."

For additional information on health care access and resources for low or no-cost health services, contact:

- National Women's Health Information Center, Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <http://www.4woman.gov/>, 1-800-994-WOMAN

- For free or low-cost mammogram and pap test, call 1-888-842-6355 or visit <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/contacts.htm>
- WISEWOMAN (Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women Across the Nation). Program for low-income, under insured and uninsured women aged 40-64 years with chronic disease risk factor screening, lifestyle intervention, and referral services, call 1-888-CDC-4NRG, (1-888-232-4674), <http://www.cdc.gov/wisewoman/>
- For information on your state's program to provide free or low-cost health insurance for eligible children 18 years or younger. Insure Kids Now Program, call 1-877-KIDS-NOW, <http://www.insurekidsnow.gov/>
- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Information Center. Resources and referrals on health care services for low-income, the uninsured and those with special health care needs call toll-free at 1-888-ASK-HRSA <http://www.ask.hrsa.gov/>
- National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, call, 1-800-950-6264, <http://www.nami.org>
- Center for Medicaid and Medicare. Information on getting medical coverage for low income and elderly, as well as health insurance for children, call 410-786-3000, <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicaid>, <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicare>, <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/schip>.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."