

## NEWS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release**—June 29, 1999

For information, contact: Charles Jama/Media Coordinator

(617) 654-9911/FAX (617) 654-9922

E-mail: [cjama@accessproject.org](mailto:cjama@accessproject.org)

Web site: [www.accessproject.org](http://www.accessproject.org)

### **Local Communities Mobilize to Improve Health Access for the Uninsured**

BOSTON—June 29, 1999— Increased activism and advocacy has emerged at the local level to deal with the health concerns of 44 million uninsured people, according to a recent survey.

The survey documents over 640 separate communities that have existing coalitions tackling the deteriorating healthcare situation for the uninsured. Most of these organizations are working to improve access to health care for children, the working poor, immigrants, rural residents and other vulnerable populations.

The survey report, **Action Where It Counts: *Communities Responding to the Challenge of Health Care for the Uninsured*** compiles data from over 1600 respondents from organizations and individuals engaged in access improvement work at the community level.

The survey was conducted by **The Access Project**, a national initiative of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in partnership with Brandeis University's Heller Graduate School. Its findings have become part of a body of evidence describing community efforts across the country that can be found on the project's web site.

"Experience has taught us that local initiatives have picked up the pieces of a broken national healthcare system that seems unable to deal effectively with the increasing economic, health, and social fall-out from so many millions of our neighbors living without adequate health care," says Catherine M. Dunham, Ed.D., the project's national director.

The report confirms that as the problem of inadequate health coverage has gotten worse, concerted citizen action at the community level is growing to address the difficult realities of accessing health care.

These local initiatives reported they are focusing their work in three major areas:

- obtaining coverage for the uninsured by changing public and private policy;
- increasing access to local health services by changing the policies of healthcare providers;
- improving public health and prevention.

“The health access issue is very much alive,” according to Dunham. “Diverse organizations have mobilized themselves into community coalitions to hold up the safety net of access to health care and to advocate for the needs of the under-served.”

In Salem, Oregon, The Oregon Health Action Campaign is a prime example of a coalition that attracted over a dozen organizations to its membership. Faith-based groups, the local school system, community health providers and human service agencies are working together to improve access and health services for vulnerable populations in Polk and Marion Counties.

Overall, 76% of the respondents said they participate in community coalitions, whose membership include advocacy groups, community providers such as clinics and health centers, public health departments, business groups, faith-based organizations, and educational institutions.

Nearly 25% of the respondents reported being in coalitions with business organizations as members.

This response has important implications in the national discussion surrounding health insurance. Small businesses, which traditionally have trouble affording healthcare benefits for employees, are becoming important allies at the local level in the push to expand coverage to

working families. In Oakland, CA, Asian Health Services is working with the business community and others to pilot a program to determine how an “affordable” health insurance package can be established for the working poor and immigrant populations in Alameda County.

“The survey report confirms and documents the importance of community action to provide solutions to a major national issue like lack of health care,” says Dunham.

-30-

**Attn: Editors and Reporters:** If you are interested in learning about who in your community responded to the survey, please contact our communications office. The report is available in PDF format, please visit: [www.accessproject.org](http://www.accessproject.org)