

GUEST EDITORIAL

Helping the uninsured in Utah

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There are 41 million Americans living without health insurance. Of those, 335,000 are Utahns. More than 72,000 are Utah children. Here in Summit and Wasatch counties, nearly 10,000 of our neighbors do not have health insurance. Last year, 1.4 million American's lost their health insurance. This is appalling! As the wealthiest and most technologically sophisticated nation in the world, our citizens and those working in this country, pursuing the American dream, deserve healthcare.

The consequences of living without health insurance are significant -- personally and economically. People without insurance often delay getting care, live with prolonged illnesses and die at younger ages. Uninsured men are nearly twice as likely to be diagnosed with an advanced state of colon cancer. Uninsured women who develop breast cancer are twice as likely to die as women who have coverage. The uninsured are four times more likely to experience an avoidable hospital or emergency visit or stay.

In families with health insurance, parents do not think twice about going to the doctor when their child has a recurrent ear infection or a persistent sore throat. But in families with no health insurance and no regular pediatrician or family doctor it is a different scenario. Because they lack healthcare coverage, these families must often choose between paying an emergency room or doctor bill and paying basic household expenses such as rent or utilities. Compared with children whose families have insurance, uninsured children are: less likely to have a regular source of care; less likely to have up-to-date immunizations; less likely to have had a recent physician visit; likely to delay seeking care; and more likely to have untreated vision problems.

Here in Park City, healthcare is intertwined with that of our local economy. Sixty percent of the tax revenue in this city is derived from tourism. The vast

majority of tourism-related businesses depend on service workers. Within our resort community, we have both year-round residents and seasonal workers who are unable to afford the costs of healthcare. Small business owners, self-employed individuals, resort workers, restaurant workers, housekeepers, etc. make up the population of the uninsured here in beautiful Summit and Wasatch counties. Ninety percent of those who are uninsured in our two counties are from working families. Their wages, like all other workers, are taxed.

While national and systematic reform is debated in Washington, D.C., many residents of the Park City area are taking action in providing care for our community's uninsured. The selfless contribution of so many volunteer medical providers, concerned and caring residents and contributors of the People's Health Clinic makes the outreach and delivery of basic medical care available to our uninsured neighbors.

This past week was Covering The Uninsured Week, a national campaign to focus attention on the plight of uninsured Americans.

Those with insurance need to get involved. Become an advocate -- get to know our local, state and national legislators and policy makers. Use generic medications when possible. Follow a sensible diet. Exercise regularly. Wear a safety belt. Wear a helmet. Write a letter to an editor of a publication. Use healthcare resources judiciously. Thank your medical provider.

Working together as a community, we continue to make a difference in the lives of many. Let's get Summit and Wasatch counties covered because "when you are uninsured, life turns out differently."

The People's Health Clinic is a non-profit organization providing medical and healthcare to underserved and uninsured residents of Summit and Wasatch counties. For more information about the plight of uninsured Americans, visit www.coveringtheuninsured.org or www.peopleshealthclinic.org.