



Access to Health Care

Each day, Susan Holcomb, Medical Social Worker at the Berrien County Health Department, is confronted with the challenge of helping Berrien County residents gain access to their needed health care services.

“I’ve seen or heard about many residents without health care coverage who are forced to use the emergency room for medical assistance; many have not seen a doctor in over 10 years,” said Holcomb. “Residents with diabetes had blood sugar levels at 500; residents with

high blood pressure are at 200/110; women have not had preventive services in several years and 80% have not had dental services since childhood, except for an emergency extraction.”

Berrien County, like many communities, has a big problem with insurance coverage, a prime contributor to access to health care problems:

- 45 Million Americans are currently uninsured
- 1.1 Million Michigan residents are uninsured
- 36,450 Berrien County residents, or 22.5% of total residents, had no health care coverage in 2005

Some of the plans that many of us have heard of that are designed to help improve access to health care by decreasing cost are still falling short of meeting the needs. For

example, the state of Michigan’s Medicaid system has had a freeze on their Adult Benefit Waiver program since March 2008. This program assists uninsured adults (with little or no income) obtain health care with a primary care medical provider and also provides emergency room coverage.

“If you are sick without health care coverage many places want cash up front prior to the delivery of health services,” said Holcomb. “There is a lack of immediate openings at health care offices and many are forced to use the emergency room which only treats the immediate issue and is costly. Many people put off “minor” care that turns out to be uncontrollable blood pressure or diabetes. Many Berrien County residents are facing life threatening illness because they are unable to find a clinic they can afford or get to.”



Health Plan Through the Health Department

The Berrien County Health Department offers assistance in determining eligibility and getting health plan coverage to those in Berrien County who lack insurance. One such program is the **Berrien Health Plan B**. This program began taking members in May 2005. The Berrien Health Plan is a non-profit program for the uninsured that provides basic preventive care. This health plan is meant to help uninsured people in Berrien County obtain primary care. Office visit costs as little as \$5 per visit. Many medications are covered for a low fee. It is primarily a preventive health program, designed to keep you healthy, and requires that participants use assigned doctors’ offices. For more on Berrien Health Plan services, see www.communityhealthplans.org.

Other Health Programs in Berrien County

Berrien Discount Prescription Program:

This plan is for Berrien County residents who lack drug coverage. The program assists in obtaining medication for a discount. For more information, go to www.communityhealthplans.org and click on prescription coverage for Berrien County.



Plan First: This plan provides family planning services for non-pregnant women ages 19-44. Included in this coverage are birth

control supplies and physical exams at no cost to participants. For more information, check out the website: www.michigan.gov/mdch

MIChild, Healthy Kids and MOMS are all programs under the Medicaid system that provides full health care coverage for children birth-19 and pregnant women. Over 14,000 Berrien County children have applied for coverage this year. This program is up for renewal by the Federal government this month. Enrollment to MIChild and/or Healthy Kids can be done on-line at www.michigan.gov/

mdch or get an application from the Berrien County Health Department. To apply for MOMS (Maternity Outpatient Medical Services) call Susan Holcomb at 927-5693. **The Department of Human Services no longer provides MOMS eligibility.**



Special thanks to Susan Holcomb, Medical Social Worker, for her help with this article!

The Berrien County Health Department has five locations to serve you:

Benton Harbor

769 Pipestone
P.O. Box 706
926-7121

M-139 Office
2106 S. M-139
927-5623

School Based
870 Colfax Ave
925-4500

Niles

1205 N. Front St.
684-2800

Three Oaks

21 N. Elm
756-2008

Or visit us on the web at www.berriencohlthdept.org

Berrien County Health

Department:

Preventing Disease,
Prolonging Life and
Protecting the
Health of the
Community.



April is Recognizing Public Health Month

April is Recognizing Public Health month, and the Health Department will bring your articles about Public Health Accomplishments, Emergency Preparedness, Tornadoes and Other Disasters, and Opportunities for the Uninsured. For questions about any of these topics, call us at **926-7121**.

BERRIEN HEALTH PLAN

You may be eligible to receive help decreasing your medical costs and getting access to medical care, if you:

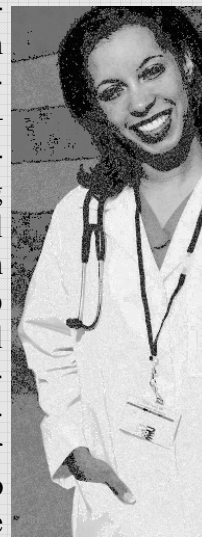
- have a household income of no more than 150% over the poverty level (\$15,315 for one person)
- are a Berrien County resident
- are not covered by another insurance plan, with the exception of a Medicaid spend down

To enroll in the Berrien Health Plan, you must make an appointment by calling **Susan Holcomb** at:

927-5693

Preventive Health Care is So Important!

Taking care of your prevention needs—seeing a doctor regularly, eating healthy, exercising, not smoking and getting screenings for long term problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and cancer—are critically important in avoiding costly and often fatal diseases. The health department can help by providing several free services, by connecting you to a primary care provider and by helping you to enroll in an insurance plan or programs.



This page is sponsored by the Berrien County Health Department

