

Families Fall Through America's Health Care Gap

Emergencies with no insurance lead to poverty

It's a common plight among local residents. With a lack of health benefits offered at work, or low-income that doesn't cut it for other health care options, people find themselves in a major financial bind when an emergency pops up and they get the doctor's bill. For some,

it's nearly impossible to pay up. Oregon Action and the Northwest Federation of Community Organizations released a recent study that reveals an alarming trend away from comprehensive, employer-based health care — and toward a health insurance system where al-

most everyone is one illness away from poverty.

Between high wage earners who have comprehensive employer health benefits, and the very poor and sick who are covered through public health programs, lies a rapidly growing population with no coverage or inadequate coverage. The health gap is growing as employers are financially forced to cut benefits because of costs insurance pre-

miums skyrocket.

As this report reveals, the primary causes of the widening of the health gap include: insurers charging more for all types of health insurance coverage; employers shifting health care costs to employees, charging them more for coverage; health insurance plans requiring new deductibles and co-payments; and having more and more employers offering high deductible plans that

make it very costly for people to get health care when they really need it.

"People may be in the health gap without realizing it," said Mallory Pratt, spokesperson for Oregon Action. "People with health insurance often don't realize that they're underinsured — until deductibles and cost sharing eat up their savings and even force them into bankruptcy."

Once a medical problem pushes

someone into the health gap, it is very difficult to climb back out. People with health problems face higher insurance premiums. They may also be unable to work full time or at all, which makes health coverage even less attainable.

The health gap study highlights the failures of the current health care system to provide quality, affordable coverage to people in Oregon. It also presents strategies for closing the health gap.

Breast-Feeding Urged for Preemies

(AP) - Specialists are trying to promote breast-feeding among mothers of premature babies. Breast milk is considered especially important for the most vulnerable babies, those born smaller than 3 1/2 pounds. But they're the least likely to get it, especially if they're born to low-income or black mothers.

Now specialists are targeting frightened mothers of the smallest preemies to try to change that - with strategies that range from free breast pumps to bringing breast-feeding "peer counselors" into the intensive care unit to train moms to nurse.

Jameca Benjamin was scared to even hold her premature baby, who weighed just under 2 pounds. The nurses were urging the teen mother to breast-

feed - yet Benjamin had never known a woman who'd breast-fed a healthy baby, much less one hooked to machines in intensive care.

Such programs are a big change for neonatal intensive care, brought about because of research in just the last few years proving that breast milk markedly lowers the chances of infection and a life-threatening bowel inflammation in very low birthweight babies.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that babies be breast-fed exclusively for the first six months. Breast-fed babies suffer fewer illnesses such as diarrhea, earache and respiratory infections; their brains seem to develop faster; and they may be less likely to develop asthma, diabetes or get fat later in life.

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Jacqueline Scott, a breastfeeding peer counselor, sits in the neonatal care unit with Jameca Benjamin and her 8-month-old, 2-pound daughter Miracle Scott at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. (AP photo)



Breast Cancer Foundation Donates \$30,000

The Sankofaa Health Institute was recently awarded with a \$30,000 grant from the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation Affiliate of Oregon and SW Washington. The community-based non-profit is one of the 14 selected this year to receive funding toward vital, life-saving programs. Sankofaa will be able to expand its Sister Keepers program, which provides integral breast health education and services.

Free Health Fair on Monday

The public is invited to a free Health Fair Extravaganza on Monday, July 18 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Pioneer Courthouse Square in downtown Portland. OASIS, a national nonprofit educational organization, is hosting the event.

The Lions Sight and Hearing Foundation will offer five health screenings: vision, glaucoma, hearing, diabetes and hypertension. Pfizer and Eisai will provide free mental health screenings.

Booths set up on the square will provide information on a variety of

health-related subjects, with free samples, drawings, and prizes available. According to OASIS executive director Robin Costic, participating vendors will represent a variety of businesses and living organizations. Live entertainment will feature The Touchables playing super hits of the 60's.

OASIS has been active in its current Meier & Frank location for more than 20 years with its local sponsors Legacy Health System, Regence BlueCross BlueShield of Oregon and Meier & Frank.

Air Bags Unsafe for Children

It may seem like a great form of car safety, but airbags in the front passenger seat of cars are not effective for children ages 14 and younger, according to a new study by an emergency medicine researcher at Oregon Health & Science University's Doernbecher Children's Hospital.

The study, "Effects of Child Age and Body Size on Serious Injury From Passenger Air Bag Presence in Motor Vehicle Crashes," will be published in the June 6 edition of the American Academy of Pediatrics' journal.

Current federally mandated warning labels in cars only indicate a risk of air bag injuries for children 12 and younger.

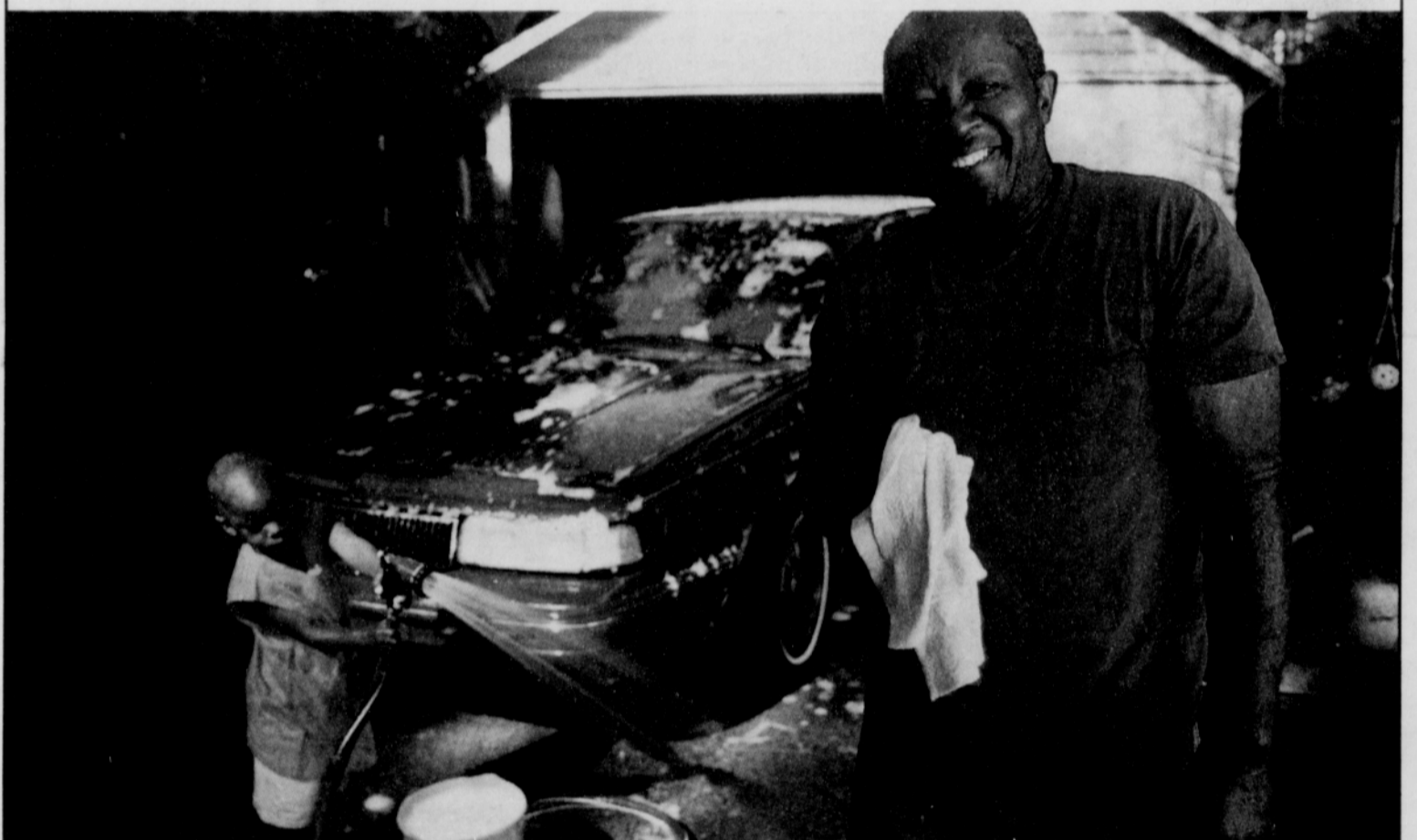
"Eight years ago, when the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration issued its recommendations, they were based on the best information (about air bag

safety) available at the time," said Craig Newgard, M.D., M.P.H., assistant professor of emergency medicine in the OHSU School of Medicine's Center for Policy and Research in Emergency Medicine, and an emergency physician at OHSU and Doernbecher hospitals.

Newgard looked at a population-based sample of 3,790 children aged 1 month to 18 years who were seated in the right front seat and involved in motor vehicle crashes. The eight-year sample was supplied by the National Automotive Sampling System Crashworthiness Data System and encompasses one of the largest, most current and comprehensive databases on air bags.

The study found that children 14 and younger were at high risk for serious injury from air bags when they sat in the front passenger seat during car crashes.

Don't sit still for arthritis pain.



Arthritis hurts. Physical activity can help. Studies show that 30 minutes of moderate physical activity three or more days a week can help you move more easily. You can break it up, too. Start with a walk. Later, rake leaves or wash the car. Keep it up, and in four to six weeks you could be hurting less and enjoying life more.

Physical Activity. The Arthritis Pain Reliever.

Call 1-800-283-7800 to learn more.

Physical activity helps manage your arthritis pain. Take it slow. Take it easy. Come and try one of the classes below. Classes are free for qualified participants. Please contact the African American Health Coalition for more information at: 503-413-1850 or visit www.aahc-portland.org.

Low Impact Aerobics
Wild Oats Market - 3535 NE 15th
Tue, 7:30-8:30pm

Water Aerobics (Contact the AAHC)
Columbia Pool - 7701 N Chautauqua
Matt Dishman - 77 NE Knott

Walking Group
Peninsula Park - 700 N Portland
(Saturday group will resume in the summer)
Lloyd Cir, 1st Fl. in front of Sears
Tue, Thu, 6:30pm

Tai Chi (Contact the AAHC)
St. John's Community Center - 8427 N. Central
Tue, 6:30-7:30pm

Seniors Physical Activity
Allen Fremont Plaza - 221 NE Fremont
Mon, 10:30-11:30am, Tue, Thu, 10:30-11:30am
Multicultural Senior Center - 5325 NE MLK
Mon, Wed, 10:30-11:30am
Irvington Village - 420 NE Mason St.
503-546-9292 x 121

3rd Annual Wellness Within REACH Walk. Saturday, September 10th at Dawson Park, located at N. Vancouver and Stanton in Portland, OR. To register or volunteer, please contact the African American Health Coalition, Inc. at 503-413-1850 or ninan@aahe-portland.org.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION • THE ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION
THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES • AFRICAN AMERICAN HEALTH COALITION, INC

