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Pilot Project Launched to Help Newly Uninsured Find Health Care

With health care reform still several years away and the unemployment rate in California remaining in double digits, a group of health care systems is launching a pilot project to help the newly uninsured find out where they can get health services.

Focusing on Antioch and East Contra Costa County where the recession has hit particularly hard, the project aims to let people who have lost their health insurance know that they can call 211 to find options for affordable health services. Kaiser Permanente is funding the campaign, which it designed with input from Contra Costa Health Services, John Muir Health, La Clinica de la Raza, Planned Parenthood: Shasta Diablo and Sutter Delta Medical Center.

"Kaiser Permanente has invested in this campaign because we know that many people who need health care will find options with a simple call to 211. 211 provides a vital community service and we want more people to know about it," said Michael Tully Cintron, Chief Operating Officer of Kaiser Permanente's Antioch Medical Center.

Ads with an eye-catching graphic where Band-Aids replace the "1" in the 211 will be appearing for the next several months in BART stations, on buses, shopping carts and in movie theaters in East Contra Costa County.

"The message is simple – 'Lost Your Health Care? Call 211 for options,'" said Dr. William Walker, Director of Contra Costa Health Services. "Many newly uninsured people don't know there are systems like ours and health coverage that can help them and their families stay healthy and get help when they are sick. This campaign will help get the word out."

211 is a national, toll-free, three-digit phone number. In Contra Costa, it is managed by the Contra Costa Crisis Center. Trained information and referral specialists talk to callers and match their needs with available local resources. The calls are free and the service is free and available 24/7 in multiple languages. Although the Kaiser-funded campaign focuses on health care, 211 provides information about a wide variety of services.

Besides the advertisements, the campaign will explore other ways to get the information out at strategic locations.

"The bottom line is that there is help out there for people who need it. Health insurance for all Americans may be three years away, but this is a resource that is available right now," said John Bateson, Executive Director of the Contra Costa Crisis Center.

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