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## Health leaders call for partnerships to strengthen safety net in East Contra Costa County

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Contra Costa Times

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Health leaders in eastern Contra Costa County are struggling to cope with rising numbers of uninsured patients who are overloading hospital emergency rooms and jamming clinics.

Many of the newly uninsured are first-time seekers of services targeted to low-income people. They lost their health coverage when they lost their jobs.

"Patients are sicker and more desperate," states a report released Monday.

The briefing paper is signed by an unusual collaboration of public and private executives, including some who often compete fiercely for health care dollars.

Among those urging immediate action to shore up local health programs are Dr. William Walker, director of Contra Costa Health Services; J. Kendall Anderson, president and chief executive officer of John Muir Health; Gary Rapaport, chief executive officer of Sutter Delta Medical Center in Antioch; Michael Tully Cintron, chief operating officer of the Kaiser Antioch Medical Center; Jane Garcia, chief executive officer of La Clinica de La Raza; and Heather Estes, president and chief executive officer

of Planned Parenthood: Shasta-Diablo.

"Even before the current economic situation was declared a recession, the health providers serving Eastern Contra Costa County had begun working together to explore how to expand capacity and were working to develop a long-range master plan," Walker stated.

"The dramatic increase in the number of uninsured has turned this effort into an immediate need."

The report can be viewed at [www.cchealth.org](http://www.cchealth.org).

"Current strategies for addressing the increased need are inadequate," the report states.

Recommendations to improve access to health care include expanding community clinics, recruiting volunteer doctors to provide free care and increasing staffing to process Medi-Cal applications.

The leaders also support programs to make it easier for low-income residents to obtain specialty care. They call for the use of more promotoras and health conductors, which are community members who serve as liaisons between Latino and African-American residents and health care organizations.

La Clinica plans to open a new primary care clinic in far eastern Contra Costa and is seeking to determine the appropriate location, the report notes. Other programs already under way for low-income residents and the uninsured include an evening drop-in urgent care clinic provided by Sutter Delta near its emergency room, John Muir's mobile health clinic serving the Brentwood area on most Saturday mornings, and Kaiser programs that provide subsidized health coverage for low-income residents.

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But the need continues to grow, the report notes. In 2008, the number of Medi-Cal applications in Contra Costa jumped 76 percent compared to 2007. This occurred at a time when county budget cuts resulted in longer delays for processing such applications.

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