

Task force releases update to 'Code Red: The Critical Condition of Health in Texas 2008' report

HOUSTON -- (March 25, 2008) -- The Task Force on Access to Health Care in Texas today released an updated report examining Texas' growing population of medically uninsured residents called "Code Red: The Critical Condition of Health in Texas 2008."

The report, prepared by a statewide task force co-chaired by Neal Lane, the Malcolm Gillis University Professor and senior fellow in science and technology policy at Rice University's James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, and Dr. John Stobo, executive director of academic programs in the University of Texas System Office of Health Affairs and former president of UT Medical Branch at Galveston, includes new recommendations for addressing the impending crisis of delivering health care to uninsured Texans.

The new report may be found online at http://www.coderedtexas.org/files/code_red_2008.pdf
<http://www.coderedtexas.org/files/code_red_2008.pdf>

The Task Force found that Texas has not taken full advantage of available federal matching funds to reduce the burden of providing health care for the uninsured and that the current county-based approach to delivery of health care is inadequate and inequitable. Additionally, these federal funds can be used to subsidize health insurance premiums and health benefits plans. The task force also found there is a significant shortage of health-care professionals in Texas.

Care for people with mental illnesses and access to dental care remain major problems for Texans, the report found. Providing health care to all Texans will require aggressively controlling health-care costs through efforts such as disease management programs, the use of electronic health records and experiments in cost-effective health-care delivery.

Among the report's new recommendations:

- Access to individualized patient-centered health homes should be extended to all Texans, including the uninsured. The health of children and their parents requires systems of health care built around such homes, which provide medical, dental, mental health, substance-abuse and preventative services.
- Public and private sectors should pursue vigorous efforts to improve the availability and affordability of health coverage through small employers.
- Texas should be the national leader in health-information technology, which should allow for standardization, connectivity and improved communication between health providers and patients.
- Approaches should be strengthened to improve school health by emphasizing nutrition, exercise, dental health and disease management at all Texas schools.

The 2008 report concludes that the long-term economic vitality and security of Texas depends critically upon the health of all its people – children and their parents – so that they may learn and work successfully. This responsibility, the report adds, must be broadly shared by individuals, families, communities and the public and private sectors.

The Task Force on Access to Health Care in Texas is sponsored by the state's 10 major academic health institutions – Baylor College of Medicine, Texas Tech University, Texas A&M University, University of North Texas and the six health institutions of The University of Texas System. The task force also includes representatives from large and small employers, health-care providers, hospitals and medical schools, as well as health policy experts and community and business leaders. The task force is the first broad-based Texas group of its kind whose membership was not determined by governmental or political considerations.

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Background Materials

Code Red: The Critical Condition of Health in Texas Web site (<http://www.coderedtexas.org>
<<http://www.coderedtexas.org/>>)

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