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**Health Reform Column:**  
*Kansas health reform to focus on those most in need*

*The following is a column by Arneatha Martin, MSN, ARNP, Retired Co-President and CEO of the Center for Health and Wellness and Board member of the Kansas Health Policy Authority (KHPA), regarding the uninsured in Kansas and how they are addressed by the 2007 health reform options proposed by the KHPA Board.*

Today more than one in ten Kansans are uninsured. Common misconceptions about the uninsured are that they are either unemployed or simply choose to not purchase insurance. On the contrary, nearly all uninsured Kansans live in a household with at least one worker.

Over 77% of the uninsured work for small businesses with 50 or fewer employees, the majority of whom work in businesses with less than 25 employees. These workers generally do not qualify for Kansas' public health insurance programs unless the employee is of very low income and disabled; pregnant; a parent; a child under 19, or elderly. Poor adults without children, and those working for small businesses who do not provide health insurance, are left without access to affordable coverage.

What are the consequences of being uninsured? The vast majority of uninsured lack access to appropriate and timely health care, so those who are uninsured are much sicker and have poorer health outcomes than Americans who are insured. The uninsured are also less likely to seek preventive care, resulting in more chronic illness and later diagnosis of life threatening disease.

Last week, the KHPA Board members voted to improve access to health care in Kansas. One of the many health reform policy options would pay for private coverage for adults without children who make less than \$10,210 a year. Another policy option would help solo business owners and very small businesses with the administration and paperwork involved in providing health insurance; encourage employees to purchase health insurance with before-tax dollars; help to stabilize the small business insurance market; and help young adults (age 19-25) get access to affordable health insurance.

These policies focus on those most in need, and would decrease the number of uninsured by a third, ranking Kansas at the top among states for the lowest number of uninsured.

The KHPA Board's recommendations for promoting personal responsibility, encouraging prevention, and advocating the use of medical homes, in addition to insuring more Kansans, are meaningful, actionable health reform options aimed to improve the health of our State.

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*\*\*The Health Policy Authority is a state agency created to develop and maintain a coordinated and data-driven health policy agenda, and it was tasked this year with reforming health care delivery in Kansas. On November 1, 2007, the Kansas Health Policy Authority Board will report to the Governor and Kansas Legislature health reform options to improve the health and health care system in Kansas.*

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