

**Philadelphia Unemployment Project**  
1201 Chestnut St, Suite 702  
Philadelphia, PA 19107 – <http://www.philaup.org>  
(P) 215.557.0822, (F) 215.557.6981



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Contact: Brady Russell,  
Organizer, 267.971.1680

## **Report: It takes too long to see a city doctor**

**Low-income workers and the uninsured call for an accessible public primary care system**

(Philadelphia - 1/9/2006) - The medically uninsured are waiting as long as five months to get into City run District Health Centers for the first time, according to a new report by the Philadelphia Unemployment Project [P.U.P.] called "Waiting: 3-to-5 months for first appointments at District Health Centers." This morning, members of the Philadelphia Unemployment Project [P.U.P.] gathered outside of Health Center #2 with their supporters to release the report and call on the city to do more for people without insurance.

"We want the Health Centers to have enough staff so people can be seen," said Irma Sumler, a member of P.U.P's Health Care Committee and user of Health Center #3. "We also want the hours extended every night and regular hours on Saturday. The people working without insurance can't afford to take off to go to the doctor."

According to the most recent data from the Philadelphia Health Management Corporation's Community Health Database [<http://www.phmc.org/chdb/>], nearly 140,000 people are living without health insurance in Philadelphia. Nationally, 82% of them are in families headed by workers, and 59% of uninsured workers work full-time.\*

"People assume that if you've got a full time job, then you don't have a problem with health care. The truth is that most uninsured people have jobs. We can see that in entry level jobs people don't get the benefits that provide health care. How can you look for work or expect to work if you don't believe you have a way to protect the health of you and your

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family?" Andre Butler, chair of the P.U.P board and Health Center #10 user, said.

Sumler said she continued using the Health Center even after she got onto Medicare and no longer had to. She said she likes going to the health centers, but added that she's seen services diminish as staff have moved on or retired, "They used to be a one-stop shop for everything you needed, which is how it should be."

The "Waiting" report compiles the results of several dozen calls made by PUP members and staff on two different occasions (first in the Summer and then in the Fall), calling all the health centers to ask for a first appointment for an uninsured, Philadelphia resident. While a few people were offered appointments within a month, that was only sporadically. Over two-thirds of the callers were offered appointments at least three months out, some as late as five months out.

The results come as no surprise to long-time supporters and users of District Health Centers. Sue Rosenthal, chair of Health Center #10's Community Board, issued a statement on behalf of all the Community Board chairs, "We - the chairs of the eight Philadelphia Health Center Community Boards - are deeply disturbed by the results of your research ... It is our hope your report will galvanize the Administration to relieve the unnecessary misery and danger caused to Health Center patients by the Administrations unconsionable delays." Rosenthal explained that the City failed to hire for the new positions approved for the Health Centers in the 2006 budget and did a poor job of refilling empty positions.

Richard Weisshaupt, Senior Attorney at Community Legal Services, said: "The kind of wait times documented by PUP are simply not acceptable -- we would not tolerate such delay in other City services essential to public health and safety, like police and fire. Hopefully, the uncovering of this scandal will be the first step towards fixing this terrible problem."

Currently, each District Health Center has a different night of the week that it stays open later than 4:30 PM. Only Health Center #2 has Saturday hours, which run from 8AM to Noon. All residents of Philadelphia may access District Health Centers, whether or not they have insurance. To find a Health Center near you, call, (215) 685-6790.

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The Philadelphia Unemployment Project [PUP] is a membership organization of unemployed and low-wage workers. It began in 1975 to help meet the needs of the unemployed during that year's recession. PUP has remained a leader in the struggle for economic justice in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania.

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\* - Employee Benefits Research Institute, <http://www.ebri.org/>