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## Forum pushes for government action

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Not having health insurance for some can feel like walking a tightrope without a net.

Just ask Coachella resident Karen Borja.

The 18-year-old has been uninsured her entire life. She travels to Mexicali, Mexico for health needs.

"If I break an arm, my family can't rush me to Mexicali," Borja said.

That's why she and other members of Our Lady of Soledad Catholic Church and Inland Congregations United for Change are spreading the word on the importance of health insurance.

As part of those efforts, the group held a Community Health Care Forum at the Coachella church on Thursday. About 70 were in attendance.

The goal: to educate residents and lobby the governor and state Legislature for children's health coverage.

With a series of health care reform proposals ready for debate this fall in Sacramento, ICUC officials said it's especially important for residents to be informed now to help foster change.

Especially since so many local children and adults go uninsured.

According to a recent health care survey of Coachella families, 60 percent of adults and 24.1 percent of children do not have health insurance.

That is unacceptable, said Elizabeth Robles, a member of ICUC.

"We need to have all children insured so our children grow up as healthy adults (and) they don't have to worry about health problems," she said.

Statewide and countywide, the statistics are less staggering, but concerning nonetheless.

In Riverside County, 24.2 percent of adults and 15.4 percent of youths 18 and younger are uninsured. And across the state, 24.8 percent of adults and 10.6 percent of kids are uninsured, according to the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

Even the insured are facing problems though.

Take Thermal resident Zenaida Hernandez, for example.

Her health insurance company won't cover the expensive medication she needs to fight her rheumatoid arthritis.

"I think our health care system in California sucks. I'm just hoping that some day we all be covered with insurance to get the medicine we need," she said.

Community leaders and clergy from across the Coachella Valley and health care organizations such as Borrego Community Health Foundation offered input on the various proposals.

The proposals range from providing insurance for all Californians to only insurance for children.

"One of the things I like is at least health care is being addressed," said Coachella Councilman Steve Hernandez.

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