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**Hamilton County Reaches Out to Residents Without
Health Insurance During “Cover the Uninsured Week”**

Cincinnati (April 29, 2008) Hamilton County has teamed up with the FreestoreFoodbank to target some of the 30,000 uninsured county elderly residents, families and children who are eligible for Medicaid coverage but have not yet sought help.

The initiative, funded by the county’s Department of Job and Family Services, hopes to get a publicity boost during Covering the Uninsured Week.

“It is always an important time to talk about elderly residents and children in our county who are falling through the cracks and not getting the medical treatment they need because they think they can’t afford it, but this week reminds us how prevalent the problem is,” said Hamilton County Commissioner Todd Portune. “The fact is, these residents are eligible for assistance that can provide them the care and preventative treatment they need to lead healthy, fulfilling lives; they just don’t know it. It is long past time that we reached out to them.”

Medicaid is a public health care program funded by the state and federal government. It provides necessary health care coverage to certain individuals with limited income. In Ohio, a person is entitled to Medicaid health care coverage for free or at a low-cost if they meet specific income and eligibility requirements. This is generally 90 percent of the federal poverty level for families (about \$18,500 for family of four) and 200 percent of the poverty level for pregnant women or children to age 19 (about \$41,000 for family of four).

Hamilton County has more than 125,000 recipients of Medicaid at any one time, approximately one in six county residents. But another 30,000 are thought to be eligible for Medicaid and do not apply. That means they often don’t pursue preventative care or even treatment until it is too late and they have a full-blown health crisis, something that is costly in terms of health and dollars.

“If we can get these additional people the health care insurance they need, we can return tens of millions of dollars in revenue to local health care providers,” Portune said.

The FreestoreFoodbank, which operates both the largest emergency food service in the Greater Cincinnati region and an Emergency Client Services Center to assist the community’s most vulnerable citizens, has a \$1 million contract to sign up some of those uninsured. The organization has targeted approximately 4,000 new recipients in each of the next three years.

John Young, president and CEO of the FreestoreFoodbank, said the organization will first look to enroll the increasing number of uninsured FreestoreFoodbank clients. It will also reach out to:

- Cincinnati-area businesses with part-time employees who do not have health insurance
- Schools and health centers that service large numbers of low-income families
- Social service agencies and other groups that work with the elderly or working poor

“The pressure on the uninsured to pay their medical bills often means they can’t pay for food or utilities and they end up seeking help for those items,” said Young, whose organization served 36,000 households and distributed 10 million pounds of food last year. “We know, because they often end up at our doorstep. With this program, we can get them the help up front for their medical bills so they are able to better manage their financial responsibilities on their own. It is better for them, and it is better for the community.”

Moira Weir, director of the county’s Department of Job and Family Services, said the outreach effort will target the following populations:

- Children to age 19
- Families with children under 18
- Pregnant woman
- Adults age 65 and over
- Individuals with disabilities
- Homeless individuals

She said there is no cap on the number of people who can enroll. To be eligible, a person must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or meet Medicaid citizenship requirements
- Have or obtain a social security number
- Meet financial eligibility requirements

“If you have any doubt whether you are eligible, please contact us and let us work with you to find out,” she said. “There is no reason for so many elderly residents or children or families to struggle – and no reason for the community to bear the financial burden – when assistance is available.”

To inquire about Medicaid, call the FreestoreFoodbank at 241-1064.

About Hamilton County’s Department of Job and Family Services

The Department of Job and Family Services administers federal, state and local programs for those in need. The Department helps with local child protection, elderly protection, child care, child support enforcement, workforce development, cash assistance, food stamp disbursement and Medicaid disbursement. Servicing Hamilton County since 1947, the Department helps hundreds of thousands each year and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation, an international, independent, not-for-profit child and family service accrediting organization.

About the FreestoreFoodbank

Founded in 1971, the FreestoreFoodbank is the largest emergency food and services provider in the tri-state. The FreestoreFoodbank distributes food and product to approximately 160,000 individuals annually through 450 nonprofit member agencies spread across 20 counties who operate food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, childcare/eldercare centers, community centers, and residential programs to help needy families in their neighborhoods. The FreestoreFoodbank also operates an Emergency Client Services Center to provide direct emergency services to Cincinnati’s most vulnerable citizens including the homeless, the working poor, the unemployed, and families in crisis.