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Lose Health Insurance? Find Help

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Statewide Programs Help Those Without Coverage

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BALTIMORE -- Many Americans who have lost their jobs and health insurance have a number of resources in which to turn to stay healthy and out of emergency rooms.

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Across the nation, about 600,000 people lost their jobs last month, and many are also losing their health insurance.

Angela Newman said she lost her job and her health insurance in August. She has two children, one of whom is asthmatic.

"The concern was the medication, the doctor's visits and how was I going to afford it," she told 11 News reporter Lisa Robinson.

Newman called 311 -- the Baltimore HealthCare Access Hotline that helps people find health care services. They were able to find insurance for her and her children.

"Parents should have health coverage to take care of the children. It's pointless to try to have a healthy family if you can't take care of your own health to maintain the children's health," said Hot Line President Kathy Westcoat.

Westcoat said she's seen a dramatic increase in calls for medical assistance over the last three months.

"We've gotten a lots of calls from individuals who have recently become unemployed or have been dropped from employer-sponsored health insurance, and we are seeing clients calling for the first time for any type of public assistance benefit," she said.

Westcoat said a lot of the callers qualify for available programs, but there are many others who don't because their incomes are too high. She said those people should still pick up the phone.



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"We refer them to a health clinic, find prescriptions, we cobble together resources and we even have contacts at local hospitals," Westcoat said.

Newman has a Master of Business Administration and is still searching for work. In the meantime, she said she's started a small business selling gourmet fortune cookies to help make ends meet.

She said no matter what a person's situation is, they should pick up the phone and ask for help.

"It can be very stressful. I can only imagine without it, you'll end up making yourself sick," she said.

The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, or COBRA -- the health insurance people can buy if they lose their jobs -- can cost as much as \$1,000 a month. But under the new stimulus plan, the government will pick up 65 percent of the total cost of COBRA coverage for the first nine months.

To reach Baltimore HealthCare Access or to find other statewide programs, use the links above.

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