

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Task Force for a Healthier North Carolina Makes Final Recommendations to Ease NC's Health Coverage Crisis

Raleigh, NC – The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund's Task Force for a Healthier North Carolina has issued its final report focusing on the health insurance crisis in our state. The last in a three-part series tackles many of the barriers faced by small employers in the provision of health coverage to their employees.

The Task Force was assisted in their efforts by the work of a research team led by Dr. Daniel Gitterman at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Task Force held a public forum in June 2007 where a variety of business, health, and insurance experts presented on the issue.

A key recommendation in the final report was to create a new statewide entity to provide financial and technical assistance to North Carolina small business owners seeking assistance with health coverage, the **Office of Small Business Health Insurance Partnerships** (OSBHIP). The Task Force further recommends that OSBHIP do the following:

- Create an online portal to provide information on, and assist in the purchase of, affordable and quality health insurance coverage.
- Pilot a two-year **premium assistance plan** for small businesses in which employees, employers, and external grant funders would each pay an equal portion toward the cost of coverage. The pilot is modeled after Tennessee's shared responsibility program, CoverTN.
- Provide technical and financial assistance to small employers who currently offer health insurance to offer that coverage as a Section 125 premium-only plan (POP). **Section 125 Plans** benefit both employees and employers by providing pre-tax savings on employee health premium expenses and employer payroll taxes respectively.
- Provide technical and financial assistance to small employers who offer **workplace wellness programs**.
- Support community-based pilots and encourage replication of successful **community-based health insurance** models. The Task Force looks to the success of FirstCarolinaCare, a community-level insurance group that utilized grant-funding support to improve access to health insurance in the Sandhills region of North Carolina.

The full report can be viewed at the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission website, or by following this link:

<http://www.healthwellnc.com/SmallBusinessreport.pdf>

About the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$143 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

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