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New directory launched for uninsured

By Georgina Brennan

A NEW online directory of health options for the uninsured or underinsured has been launched by the Greater New York Hospital Association. The directory, called the Health Information Tool for Empowerment (HITE) www.hitesite.org is a site that allows the low-income, and the uninsured to arm themselves with a broad array of health and support services available in their own communities and at national and state levels. According to the Greater New York Hospital Association, more than one in two uninsured Americans are unaware of low-cost health care services in their community. In New York State alone, 3 million people lack health insurance, and many more have inadequate coverage. Moreover, one million New Yorkers - one-third of the State's uninsured population - qualify for Medicaid, Child Health Plus, or Family Health Plus but are not enrolled. Before this website there was no database, on paper or online that listed programs and services specifically for uninsured people. Consequently, many health and social service providers found it impossible to identify all the national, state, and local programs available to their low-income clients. HITE streamlines the process of connecting people with inadequate coverage to free and low-cost services. The web site contains a listing of thousands of government, non-profit, and privately sponsored programs and services available and allows visitors to search for resources by zip code, services offered, medical conditions treated, or languages spoken. Within seconds, HITE identifies a variety of programs and organizations that meet each uninsured client's unique needs. The site also offers users an eligibility calculator that quickly determines if a person is likely to qualify for one of New York State's public health insurance programs. The website is free, easy-to-use, and saves time. If someone is already being treated, they can ask their doctor to do a search for better options for them. Alternatively community centers can help with a search if computers present a problem. Clinics and other health care facilities, free and low-cost prescription drugs, mental health and substance abuse treatment programs, dental and optical care, support services for immigrants and free legal services are all available to browse on the website. The program is currently being pilot tested in Brooklyn, Northern Manhattan, and a seven-county region around the Binghamton area. It will be made available to other areas later this year.