

## Marin Voice: Health care reform from the front lines in Marin

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AFTER MANY YEARS and great effort, health care reform is finally here.

A major deadline is looming — March 31. The end of the month is the last date for individuals to enroll in Covered California, the health insurance exchange that offers affordable insurance options to thousands of Marin residents who are currently uninsured.

This much-anticipated reform has already brought major improvements to the lives of many Marin residents.

Imagine being a family of four with no health insurance so you don't seek health care or must wait until it is a dire emergency. Now that scenario is becoming a thing of the past for many people.

Marin County has over 13,000 residents who qualify for either Medi-Cal or Covered California.

As the county's largest provider of health and dental care to residents without insurance, we at Marin Community Clinics realized early on that we would be playing a key role in educating and enrolling people in our community.

We are very enthusiastic about being actively involved at such an important moment.

We have been assisting not only our patients, but the whole community since day one — Oct. 1.

With the assistance of a grant from the Health Resources Services Administration, we have hired specially-certified enrollment counselors, and coordinated outreach activities to ensure that community members are aware of their options and know that we can provide assistance enrolling in Covered California.

In addition to sending letters to our uninsured patients to let them know we would like to help them enroll, Marin Community Clinics has provided information through presentations at local churches in Spanish and Portuguese, participated in the College of Marin Health Fair, presented to local non-profit organizations, and participated in other events throughout our county.

We have been collaborating with other community clinics and the county Department of Health and Human Services to promote the "Covered Marin" initiative and to maximize outreach and enrollment efforts.

As a result, Marin Community Clinics has helped over 5,000 Marin residents — and the volume of calls, emails, and walk-ins grows every day. Marin Community Clinics' enrollment counselors are very busy and are aiming to facilitate a positive experience for all.

There have been a number of surprises (some pleasant ones) since our journey started.

- Many who are looking to enroll were in fact eligible for Medi-Cal benefits through Medi-Cal before

reform took place, but were unaware of this assistance.

- The Latino community has shown a significant interest in learning about insurance options.
- Women are playing a key role in spreading the word and getting their families enrolled.
- People who had pre-existing conditions and were previously unable to obtain insurance coverage were anxiously awaiting health care reform and are thrilled that they now have access to insurance.

This endeavor has been extremely rewarding and gratifying. The Affordable Care Act is not a perfect law and there are gaps that need to be filled, but it is certainly better than the system we had before. I'm positive that our county is moving in the right direction — creating a healthier community.

For enrollment assistance, call 755-2586, email [insurancehelp@marinclinics.org](mailto:insurancehelp@marinclinics.org) or visit our locations in San Rafael, Greenbrae or Novato. Log onto [marinclinics.org](http://marinclinics.org) for directions and hours.

We at Marin Community Clinics are eager to see the results of our hard work and the impact it will have on our community. In the meantime, we continue to help community members enroll.

History is being made, so let's make history together.

Meilyn Santana is the outreach and enrollment director and the referral department manager for the Marin Community Clinics. She lives in San Rafael.