



**MAILING ADDRESS**  
PO Box 17179  
Chapel Hill, NC 27516-7179  
(919) 933-8494  
FAX (919) 933-9201

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**CONTACT: Debra Markley, MPH**  
**919-933-8494, ext 1468**

## Piedmont Health helping to prepare the public for the Affordable Care Act

**CORPORATE OFFICE**  
299 Lloyd Street  
Carrboro, NC 27510  
(919) 933-8494  
FAX (919) 933-9201

**CARRBORO COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER**  
301 Lloyd Street  
Carrboro, NC 27510  
(919) 942-8741  
FAX (919) 942-1473

**CHARLES DREW COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER**  
221 N. Graham Hopedale Road  
Burlington, NC 27217-2971  
(336) 570-3739  
FAX (336) 570-1215

**MONCURE COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER**  
PO Box 319  
7228 Pittsboro-Moncure Road  
Moncure, NC 27559  
(919) 542-4991  
FAX (919) 542-3726

**PROSPECT HILL COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER**  
PO Box 4  
140 Main Street  
Prospect Hill, NC 27314  
(336) 562-3311  
FAX (336) 562-4444  
TOLL FREE (800) 898-9577

**SCOTT CLINIC**  
5270 Union Ridge Road  
Burlington, NC 27217  
(336) 421-3247  
FAX (336) 421-3275

**SILER CITY COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER**  
PO Box 831  
224 South 10th Avenue  
Siler City NC 27344  
(919) 663-1744  
FAX (919) 663-1635

**CARRBORO** – With Oct. 1 approaching, the date the public can begin enrolling for insurance plans under the Affordable Care Act, Piedmont Health is working hard to help the public understand the changes in the law. Piedmont Health, which operates six community health centers and a Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly in central North Carolina, is among the many organizations around the nation receiving grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to help with outreach and enrollment under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Insurance coverage under the ACA begins Jan. 1, 2014, but people can enroll starting Oct. 1.

Piedmont is notifying about 9,000 of its patients about the law, as well as a number of outside groups including churches, chambers of commerce and community groups, according to Brian Toomey, Piedmont's CEO.

The outreach is a public service, Toomey said. "What we are doing is cutting through the noise that has surrounded this issue and making sure people get the facts," he said. "All changes are going to create anxiety. People need to understand the new law. Our job is to make sure that everybody is informed about his or her options. We want to make sure everybody has the information they need to make a decision on this important matter."

According to Toomey and Lydia Mason, who is heading up the training effort, Piedmont has designated about 50 staff members to be outreach and enrollment coordinators. The training is done by the Health and Human Services Department in webinars and takes about five hours. It is typically spread out over two days.

The coordinators have to pass several exams to become certified, Mason said. She said the training emphasizes various safeguards, including making sure that the coordinators are objective and do not steer patients to any particular plan, and that patient information is kept private in accordance with applicable laws such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

Latishia Vincent, a coordinator who is among the leaders of the effort, said that the training ensures a thorough knowledge of the ACA. "The idea is that people of all education levels be able to understand it. If we can't explain something, we refer people to the help desk," she said, referring to the office maintained by the Health and Human Services Department to help with outreach.

The average time spent with each family will be two hours, but coordinators will spend as much time as it takes, Mason said. "We are committed to doing an excellent job," she added. "We don't want anyone to rush into a decision that's not right for them."

*For more information about Piedmont Health, call 919-933-8494 or visit [www.piedmonthealth.org](http://www.piedmonthealth.org).*