

# News from Maternal and Child Health Access



## OUTREACH – An Offer of Help

We met Lupe more than two years ago at a WIC site (Women, Infants and Children supplementary food program), where an MCHA outreach worker helped her with her food stamp application. It was a simple task, reporting her income so she could receive food stamps for her family of three teenage sons and a three-year-old daughter. Over the year, our outreach workers saw Lupe again, helping her with health coverage applications for her family.

Last month, first thing in the morning, Lupe came to the MCHA office. She asked if someone could help her fill out her yearly redetermination packet for her children's medical and income assistance. A case manager began to help her complete the many forms. Once in the safety of the office though, Lupe seemed upset, and soon she began to cry. She sobbed through the telling of her story: Her husband left her and their children three years ago for another woman, but now he wanted to return "home." He had a history of being violent. Two weeks earlier, he had pushed his way into their apartment and beaten Lupe in front of the children. They all were terrified by the prospect of having him back in their lives.

We listened to Lupe, gave her hot tea and plenty of tissues, reassured her often that she had options and that we would help her in any way possible, but she was not able to hear much of what we said. She told us that she felt she was trapped in a box and that she had no way of getting out. She also told us how frightened she was for her children. Over and over, we told Lupe that the box had doors and that we would help her get through them. Finally, when she was able to listen, we explained a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) against her ex-husband. She started to cry again,



but this time it was from a sense of relief. She was able to see that we really were able to help her.

That same day, one of our outreach workers accompanied Lupe to the courthouse and stayed with her into the night until she received the TRO. We helped her file for the TRO, request temporary custody of her children, which was granted, and then apply for a fee waiver to have the Sheriff's Department serve the Restraining Order to her husband. Lupe could not believe that we would do all this with her. The following day, Lupe and her children came to our office and the same case manager who had worked with her the day before helped her to fill out the remaining forms. The case manager

explained to the children what the TRO meant for them, and their own sense of relief was evident.

Since that time, we have helped Lupe fill out applications for apartments; have found her family essential household items such as beds; and have given her transportation assistance, clothing and vouchers for food. Now Lupe looks like a different person from the one we saw on that early morning in October.

It wasn't easy for Lupe to trust us enough to let us be of help. It took our assistance with other issues several times over two years and as it turns out, other visits to our office as well. It took that long for Lupe to gain enough trust to allow us to help her with the largest problems in her life and the lives of her children. Fortunately, we are so firmly rooted in this community and we provided such a valuable service to her that she kept returning until her trust was finally secure.

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## Outreach

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### Outreach – A First Step Toward Lasting Change

At first glance, "outreach" – like what we provided Lupe – may seem easy to define and a simple construct – "reaching out" by going to places frequented by people who may need help with health coverage – and offering services. In truth, the process is often anything but simple. When someone offers help, those in need respond with a myriad of issues, some health-related and some not.

In our experience, enrollment is often not the "presenting issue," especially since some 90% of children have health coverage in California, according to the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, and because very few enrollment programs exist for low- and working-income adults. Finding a doctor or clinic, making that health coverage "work," renewing both the health coverage program and the health plan from which services are obtained – these are the issues that arise when we talk to people. "My [health coverage] card doesn't work," or "My baby is sick and I can't find help."

Housing is also a major need in Los Angeles, one for which the need always outstrips the demand. "Food insecurity," a new term for the hunger and poor nutrition in which families may live, is on the rise in Los Angeles, according to a new study by the Los Angeles Department of Public Health. The number of

households in Los Angeles without enough to eat increased 17% between 2002 and 2005 – a number approaching 500,000 families. Domestic violence increases with poverty and pregnancy. And sometimes, women living in isolation with children just need a break and to get out for a while. All of these are reasons MCH Access is successful at ultimately assisting women, who are usually responsible for health care for a family, to enroll in health coverage or to address a health problem.

In September, the Schwarzenegger administration cut \$35 million in these kinds of outreach services from the state budget. They say that a \$50 fee per enrollment paid to outreach contractors minimizes the effects of the budget cuts. Our work costs more than fifty dollars. It takes time and effort to help families enroll, and it takes experience and tenacity to make change to health coverage systems so that they work, so people can access services and maintain their coverage. The Governor's cuts affect people like newborn Ari Barbero and 17-year-old Denise Badillo, MCHA's clients featured in the [Los Angeles Times](#) on September 14, 2007.

There are more than 200,000 other children in Los Angeles who are uninsured yet eligible for free and low-cost health coverage. Thank you to all our supporters for your dollars that help support our work, for helping us keep our doors open to the community, and for your encouragement in these trying times.

mch

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- Holiday gifts for 100-150 families, such as blankets and children's toys.
- Yarn for knitting, craft supplies, fabric or gift certificates to stores with these items, such as Joann's, Michaels, or Michael Levine's
- New or gently used maternity clothing
- New or gently used baby/children's clothing
- New or gently used bedding/towels
- New or gently used slings or other baby carriers
- Household items
- Educational toys, children's books in Spanish and English, art supplies, school supplies
- Beds that include mattresses still in good shape (our clients sleep on the floor)
- Childproofing items: locks, table corners, cabinet closures, plug covers
- Sewing machines that work well or need only small repairs
- Sturdy cardboard file boxes
- Computers
- Digital camera
- Small color printers
- Office supplies: paper, toner, pens, staples, you name it.
- Professional photography for our office, brochures and newsletters.

#### For our offices...

- Small round office tables
- Office chairs
- Bookcases
- Storage site for donated furniture (near downtown)

## Maternal & Child Health Access

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# mch Advocate

## MCHA Women of Distinction



The State of California and La Opinion newspaper honored staff of Maternal and Child Health Access (MCHA) with two important awards this year, helping to bring important recognition to our work. In March, Dolores Carlos, Case Manager in our Perinatal Outreach and Education program and founder of our Women's Arts Collective, was

honored as a "Woman of Distinction" by La Opinion Newspaper for her more than 30 years of work with the poor. La Opinion began this award in honor of International Women's Day, and honors advocates who, "in their daily lives as professionals, community leaders, in their homes or in other places have worked not to benefit themselves, but for the betterment of their community or social environment."

La Opinion also noted, "The majority of the women honored conduct their work anonymously, without expectation of any recognition whatsoever." MCHA thanks La Opinion for saluting Dolores' creativity, commitment and daily work with families experiencing domestic violence, homeless women, and new immigrants – work that brings health and hope to the most vulnerable in our community.

Lynn Kersey, MCHA's Executive Director, was honored in May as part of Women's Health Month. In a beautiful ceremony at the California - Museum for History, Women, and the Arts in Sacramento, Lynn was presented with the sixth annual Helen Rodriguez-Trias Award for Excellence in Community-Based Women's Health Leadership. "For more than 20 years, Lynn Kersey has pioneered ways to improve living conditions for low-income women, working tirelessly to achieve healthier



environments in which to raise children," said State Public Health Officer Dr. Mark Horton. "Every year, the organization she founded helps thousands of uninsured families enroll in health coverage programs and find access to quality health care."

The award was established in memory of Dr. Helen Rodriguez-Trias, a nationally recognized health care leader in the fight for women and children's health issues. Accepting the award, Lynn noted, "It is indeed an honor to be linked to Dr. Rodriguez-Trias, a former President of APHA and a hero in health care for underserved populations, especially Latinas."

The award ceremony marked the release of new women's health research findings and two new publications, the "Directory of Health Programs Serving Women" and "California Women's Health 2007," the latter an important resource of women's health data. For more on these awards, see our website, "About MCHA"!

**Top photo, Left:** Dolores Carlos with her art. **Top photo, Right:** from left to right: Women's Health Council Member Golnaz Agahi; Director of Health Care Services Sandra Shewry; Chief, Office of Women's Health Terri Thorfinsson; Lynn Kersey, MCHA Executive Director; Women's Health Council Member Yali Bair and Director of Public Health Mark Horton, MD.