

## News Release

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### **GOVERNOR'S ROUNDTABLE ON HEALTH CARE GOES TO WORK**

#### **Individuals from across the state bring a variety of perspectives to quest for solutions to Arkansas's health care problems**

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (December 14, 2007) – The new Governor's Roundtable on Health Care, announced recently by Governor Beebe, held its inaugural meeting at the State Capitol today. The mission: identify achievable strategies to improve health through better access to health care.

While strides have been made in Arkansas toward improving access to health care, especially through the ARKids program, there are still more than half-a-million citizens – mostly working Arkansans between the ages of 19 and 64 – who lack basic health coverage. Recent reports highlight that even those with insurance are bearing a higher cost burden through co-payments and deductibles.

According to Dr. Joe Thompson, Arkansas's Surgeon General and Director of the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI), issues surrounding health care are complex and require a focused effort to examine strategies to support families across the state.

“Health is the most important asset one has. Yet, because of increasing health care costs and fragmentation of our system of care, citizens in the state find themselves gambling on their personal future. We must find a way to deliver high quality care to citizens when and where they need it. At the same time, this care must be affordable and help businesses and communities build and grow their local economies,” Thompson said.

Tasked with staffing the Roundtable, ACHI went beyond statistics to illustrate the challenges for the new group. Two people came to the meeting to personally tell how a lack of health insurance has affected their lives.

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*ACHI is a nonpartisan, independent, health policy center that serves as a catalyst to improve the health of Arkansans.*



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A single mother participating in the Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund looks forward to better times as she pursues her college degree. While her young son is enrolled in the ARKids program, paying the premiums for insurance for herself is out of the question at this time. Another woman, who at one time had cancer, told of being turned down for health insurance or quoted an enormous premium, despite the fact that she has been cancer free for the past seven years. Her husband recently signed up his small business for ARHealthNet – the new state and federal health benefits program – and is now able to provide coverage for her.

“Unfortunately, this is just a very small sample of real situations that people face every day in our state,” Thompson said. “Our job over the next 18 months is to find solutions.”

The 31-member Roundtable consists of non-governmental individuals from across the state representing the health, health care, business, and, importantly, consumer sectors. A series of bi-monthly meetings is scheduled to begin in early 2008, to be held in Little Rock and around the state.

The Arkansas Center for Health Improvement is a non-partisan, independent health policy center dedicated to improving the health of Arkansans. It is jointly sponsored by the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, the Arkansas Department of Human Services, and Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

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