

Five thousand register for the free health care clinic in Los Angeles

Our correspondents

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About 5,000 people lined up at the Los Angeles Sports Arena in California to register for free health care earlier this week. The event, sponsored by CareNow Free Clinic, supported by hundreds of volunteers, began to offer medical services on Thursday. It will run for four days.

The huge turnout for the event is another demonstration of the desperate and growing health care crisis in the United States.

The clinic has partnered with dozens of health organizations to provide services in dentistry, ophthalmology, and general medicine. It will also provide flu shots and physical examinations. There are programs for preventive care as well as employment and legal counseling.

Dental care is the most popular of the services offered by the clinic, especially now that Medi-Cal, California's Medicaid health program for the poor, no longer covers most dental work.

Last year, CareNow co-sponsored three clinics—one in Long Beach and two in Los Angeles—that served 15,330 people with 35,120 medical, dental and vision services valued at more than \$7 million.

By 6:30 a.m. on Monday, more than a thousand people were waiting in line to register for the clinic. Many had brought tents, blankets, and chairs to help them through the long hours of waiting. Several had camped the whole night so they would not miss registration. By 11:30 a.m., Los Angeles's semi-desert weather temperatures had gone from chilly to sweltering, and the ranks of people in line had grown to

5,000 people.

Anthony Paschal Junior and his wife, Teiko, both in their 20s, came to register for the clinic with their two-year-old child, Kaori. They live about an hour away, but had spent the previous night nearby with friends so they could be at the clinic early.

Teiko attends La Sierra University in Riverside, where she receives very limited health coverage. "It does not cover physicals, Pap smears or breast exams," she said.

Anthony works at Nations Seventh Day Adventist Church in Riverside County. "Even though we're having a very difficult time just to have the necessities of life, we do not qualify for any government assistance because we are marginally over the income limit. Our child is behind with immunizations, and this is a major cause for concern for us. We are also hoping to get physicals for ourselves."

Charlie, 49, is a former real estate agent who lost his home in April. He's had to file for bankruptcy since then. "I am in dire need of surgery for testicular cysts that were discovered in March. I cannot afford any health insurance. I am in constant pain. Right now life is miserable."

Film editor Zanni Roxwell, a young woman, had come to the clinic along with her friend, Frank Ring, because of severe cuts in Medi-Cal. "Today I have to make a choice between vision care or having my teeth fixed," she said. She added, "Even though it is important for me as a film editor to have new glasses to improve my vision," she opted to have her teeth done.

Frank said that at times he has to move from place to place. He is unemployed and uninsured. “I would like the big corporations to stop having as much influence as they do over our lives.”

The WSWS also spoke to several people from Homeboy Industries, which helps at-risk youth that at one time had been involved with gangs. Some had been previously incarcerated.

One of the young women had not been to the dentist since 2006. Many people who have been incarcerated have particularly difficulty finding work, which leaves them without insurance.

Richard Kennedy, one of the many opting for free dental, said, “I’m down here to get my teeth fixed. I’m on Medicare and Medi-Cal. I’ve been on Social Security and disability, but they cut that, and now this is the only place I can go.

“I’m looking for work. I recently got my degree in business administration, but there are too many people out there. I heard recently that there are 300 people applying for each job opening.”

When asked about the economy, Richard said, “I think it’s going to wind up worse with Congress cutting and slashing.”

On the Occupy Wall Street Protests, Richard said, “I’m with them.” As for Obama, he added, “I think he’s folding up too much to the Republicans. Every time he gets up there he throws somebody under the bus, like Rev. Wright. Obama’s farther right than Richard Nixon.”

The WSWS talked to a volunteer interpreter, Julia Vazquez. “I may not be a good translator or interpreter, but I know enough to assist people when needed. I have been financially struggling severely the last few months, and sometimes I do not even have gas money to get to work, but I somehow manage to make it through and earn money no matter what.

“It devastates me to know that so many people cannot

afford health care. My mom doesn’t even have health care, and she’s been here 38 years and is a US citizen. It is crazy. I would not have health care either if it wasn’t for my coverage through the military. I know so many people that have not been to the dentist in years or have not gotten their vision checked. It seems as though our government’s priorities aren’t health care or education.”

Laron spoke about the economic situation facing young people, “Since 2008, it has been really hard for middle-class people to get back on their feet. People find it degrading to look for jobs, and there are only fast food jobs available.

“I was doing financial consulting for an international hair treatment company until last month. They laid off 17 people out of a small office of 30. Getting unemployment insurance is a lot harder than it used to be, and it doesn’t cover health and dental.

“There’s always been money for big corporations,” he added. “You’re either rich or you’re poor now. The middle class is gone. That’s why there are a thousand people right now in LA lining up for free health care.”



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