

**EMBARGOED UNTIL JULY 31 A.M.**

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**BALTIMORE CLINICS KEEP CITY'S POOR FROM GOING UNDER;  
NEW STUDY SHOWS**

*Press Conference to Be Held at 10 a.m. on Monday, July 30*

**BALTIMORE** -- Baltimore's poor suffer a staggering array of medical and social service needs and are only being sustained by an outstanding network of free health clinics and soup kitchens, according to a new study. The study, sponsored by the Open Society Institute-Baltimore, will be released at a press conference at 10 a.m. on July 30 at the OSI-Baltimore office, 201 N. Charles Street, Suite 1300.

The study details the health problems plaguing area residents who use "safety net" organizations -- soup kitchens, outreach centers and community clinics. The study sought to assess services that indigent people receive from these groups, their past experience obtaining help from traditional providers, and what they fear and predict will happen if these services were reduced or cut.

"There are unspoken heroes in Baltimore who are keeping a destitute population from completely going under," said the study's author Dr. Tom O'Toole, who is a program officer of the Open Society Institute's Medicine as a Profession initiative and a health services researcher at Johns Hopkins University.

The study shows that the severe problems confronting people using safety net services are compounded by a lack of health insurance, which is preventing them from receiving help from traditional providers such as area hospitals. The study, which focuses on poor, middle-aged African American men, shows:

- Three out of four people surveyed suffer from at least one chronic medical condition, most often HIV/AIDS, hypertension or chronic hepatitis; 30 percent suffer from three or more chronic ailments.  
- More -
- Only about 30 percent interviewed carry medical insurance, typically Medicaid coverage.
- Almost half interviewed receive at least three different services at safety net sites, and 75 percent cannot identify alternative sites for help if those services were cut.

O'Toole said that some of the clinics and soup kitchens could be forced to slash their services if proposed budget cuts by the Administration are enacted. For fiscal year 2002, the Administration has proposed cutting \$1.5 billion from the Health Resource Services Administration, which provides funding for many Baltimore area clinics. "We need to appreciate how vulnerable these people are to the decisions made in Washington."

Among the study's most disturbing finding is that nearly 30 percent of those interviewed report they would be either homeless, actively using drugs, or dead if care at safety net sites were not available.

"This study reveals the precarious situation of people living in poverty," says Diana Morris, director of OSI-Baltimore. "People are often hanging on by a thread. If one medical or social support disappears, their stability can dissolve and their ability to take care of their other basic human needs can slip away. Being healthy and being able to work, to secure a safe home and to be a good parent are inextricably linked."

Morris says society often does not fully assess the "cost to the community" of reducing safety net supports. "We all share the goal of people becoming productive members of our community," she said. "But people can't be productive if they're worried about having a roof over their heads and feeling well enough to work and take care of their children. It's therefore in the community's interest to ensure that our poorest neighbors have good access to medical and social services."

Morris stressed that Baltimore's safety net sites also provide vital support for Baltimore's working poor who, despite their best efforts, still struggle to make ends meet. "We must recognize that this safety net all too often is critical to the well-being of people who are working full time yet not making enough money or receiving adequate health benefits to meet the basic needs of their families."

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*The Open Society Institute is a private operating and grantmaking foundation that promotes the development of open society around the world. OSI's U.S. Programs seek to strengthen democracy in the United States by addressing barriers to opportunity and justice, broadening public discussion about such barriers, and assisting marginalized groups to participate equally in civil society and to make their voices heard. U.S. Programs challenge over-reliance on the market by advocating appropriate government responsibility for human needs and promoting public interest and service values in law, medicine, and the media. OSI's U.S. Programs support initiatives in a range of areas, including access to justice for low and moderate income people; independence of the judiciary; ending the death penalty; reducing gun violence and over-reliance on incarceration; drug policy reform; inner-city education and youth programs; fair treatment of immigrants; reproductive health and choice; campaign finance reform; and improved care of the dying. OSI is part of the network of foundations, created and funded by George Soros, active in more than 50 countries around the world.*

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