

*Public Policy Roundtable*

**“California’s Uninsured and the Expansion of Coverage: Do Our Leaders Have the Will to Lead Us Where We Need to Go?”**

**Dr. E. Richard Brown, Director, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research**

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As the recent flurry of proposals to increase health insurance access in California indicates, California’s health insurance coverage debate is of increasing importance for policy makers and residents alike. Dr. E. Richard Brown, Director of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, weighed in on the issue at the Public Policy Roundtable, identifying some of the policy options to achieve comprehensive, equitable health insurance coverage in California. With 6.5 million Californians uninsured for all or part of 2005, Dr. Brown pointed to declining employment-based health insurance coverage and rising health care costs as major culprits. Dr. Brown recommended the Institute of Medicine’s five guiding strategies to expand health care coverage in California which state that health care coverage should: 1) be universal; 2) be continuous; 3) be affordable to individuals and adults; 4) be affordable and sustainable for society; 5) be effective, efficient, safe, timely, patient-centered, and equitable. Dr. Brown cited the recent policy proposals by Senator Sheila Kuehl, Senator Don Perata, Kaiser Permanente, and Governor Schwarzenegger as hopeful policy options for health coverage reform in 2007. He argued that for genuine health care insurance reform to occur a broad coalition will be needed, including business, labor, clergy, and sectors traditionally opposed to universal health care. Additionally, said Dr. Brown, strong political leadership from the Governor and legislative leaders combined with a public education campaign will be necessary to overcome the longstanding barriers that have thwarted many past efforts to expand health insurance in California.