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Local

Labor, liberal groups press for national health plan

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BALTIMORE -

A coalition of close to 100 labor, liberal and progressive groups on Tuesday launched a \$40 million national campaign called Health Care for America Now to push for federal action to guarantee quality, affordable medical insurance.

On July 1, Maryland expanded Medicaid coverage to families with incomes below \$20,500. But Health Care for America Now is trying to reach working people like Delores Cheatham, a full-time nursing assistant for a temporary agency in Baltimore.

"I cannot afford to purchase health care," said Cheatham, who was going to be charged \$600 a month. She lost her health coverage due to a pre-existing condition — a severe case of gastroesophageal reflux disease that required several surgeries.

The groups are asking candidates for Congress to support a health coverage that includes a choice of insurance plans, standard comprehensive benefits and premiums based on the ability to afford it. The group does not suggest how much the federal initiative would cost or how it might be paid for.

"This is the year for affordable health care, or we're going to have the same old thing," said Elbridge James, president of [Progressive Maryland](#), at a small rally at the State House. Similar events were being held in 36 other state capitals and other cities around the country.

Maryland groups supporting the effort include unions such as AFSCME, SEIU, UFCW, [MSTA](#) (teachers) and the Maryland-DC AFL-CIO and community and political groups such as Maryland [ACORN](#) and MoveOn, and the [Health Care for All coalition](#).

Glen Middleton, Maryland executive director of [AFSCME](#), the government employees union, complained about "excessive profits in the pharmaceutical industry" and excessive salaries for executives in for-profit health care companies.

The group says that over the next five months it will spend \$25 million on paid media and have 100 community organizers around the country to keep the issue alive in campaigns for Congress.

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