



# PRESS RELEASE

## *El Dorado County* **PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

Gayle Erbe-Hamlin, Director    Stephen G. Drogin, M.D., Health Officer  
931 Spring Street, Placerville, CA 95667 (530) 621-6120/ FAX (530) 626-4713

*Healthy People Living in Healthy Communities Throughout El Dorado County*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
February 23, 2005

**CONTACT:**  
Margaret Williams  
(530) 621-6243  
[www.co.el-dorado.ca.us/publichealth](http://www.co.el-dorado.ca.us/publichealth)

### **Local Businesses Form Advisory Group** **To Improve Access to Health Care For Employees**

A local business advisory committee, concerned about the high cost of health insurance and lack of health care access for employees, has been formed in El Dorado County. Through an initiative known as ACCEL (Access El Dorado), the Business Advisory Committee began meeting this January, with representatives from 16 area businesses and community agencies in El Dorado County. The group is now developing a business action plan that will outline recommendations for businesses to address the problem of health care access. The plan will be shared with businesses in the community in the near future.

It is estimated that over 10% of El Dorado County residents do not have public or private health insurance, and many more individuals are underinsured. According to Shawna Purvines, director of the Office of El Dorado County Economic Development and member of the ACCEL Business Advisory Committee, businesses, particularly small businesses, are struggling to provide insurance for their employees. "We are concerned about the viability of our small businesses and the health of our employees," said Purvines. "Small businesses in El Dorado County can't afford the cost of health insurance for their employees, neither can they afford the loss of valuable staff time due to personal or family illness." Purvines points to studies that indicate that a healthy lifestyle that includes access to health services improves overall productivity.

Small businesses, those with 50 or fewer employees, make up the largest business group in El Dorado County and are the predominant employers of people who are uninsured or underinsured. Of

the approximately 3,000 small businesses currently in operation in El Dorado County, nearly two-thirds employ five or fewer people.

Representatives of twenty-nine El Dorado County small businesses recently came together to participate in focus groups where their initial ideas for the business action plan were collected. Businesses came from all parts of the County, including the West Slope and the Tahoe Basin, and represented retail, service, hospitality, agricultural, construction, business and professional services, to name a few. Ideas were collected and forwarded to the ACCEL Business Advisory Committee for possible incorporation into the action plan. Ideas included: 1) informing employees of health care services they or their children might be eligible for at no cost or low cost, 2) sponsoring health and wellness activities for employees and families, and 3) providing expert consulting and education to businesses wanting to consider health plan benefits or review new options.

“I’m excited by the possibility that members of our community can work together to make health care more accessible to small businesses, either by helping produce cost efficiencies with the health-care system, sharing knowledge of existing cost-effective programs, or working collectively to obtain more competitive coverage,” said Dick Bush, founder of Madrona Vineyards in Camino, and member of the advisory committee.

Businesses and agencies currently represented in the ACCEL Business Advisory Committee include Arnolds for Awards, Barkley Meat Company, Blue Ribbon Personnel Services, Elder Options, El Dorado County Chamber of Commerce, El Dorado County Economic Development, Green Valley Mortuary, Happy Kids Preschool, Job One, Lakeside Inn and Casino, Madrona Vineyards, Minuteman Press, Shehadi Motors, South Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, South Lake Tahoe Refuse Company, and Tahoe Import Auto Repair.

The ACCEL initiative is a countywide public-private collaborative partnership aimed at improving the health of El Dorado County residents by changing the health care system to increase the number of people who have health insurance, improve health care delivery, and improve return on investment in health care. For more information about ACCEL and the Business Advisory Committee contact Mary Lynn Carlton, project coordinator, at (530) 622-5554.

###