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## Program sees role under health reform

### Safety net for poor expects to evolve

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Leaders of St. Paul-based Portico Healthnet believe their safety-net program will have a future despite federal health care reform that will cover more of Minnesota's uninsured.

While the reform package signed by President Barack Obama will extend health benefits to 32 million uninsured Americans, some won't

receive those benefits for years and others won't qualify, said Debra Holmgren, Portico's executive director.

"The reason we're not packing our boxes, I guess, is it's a process," she said. "From everything I read, it will be six to 10 years until they get all 32 million people (covered)."

Portico first determines whether people are eligible for publicly subsidized health programs in Minnesota. For those who aren't, the organi-

zation covers basic primary care to increase the chances they stay healthy and won't need expensive hospital care.

The donor-funded program paid for the primary care of 1,400 people in 2008 but had another 600 on a waiting list. Most of the recipients are working families making less than \$35,000. The organization reports fewer emergency-room visits and hospitalizations for people it covers.

Holmgren said Portico's target population could change as federal reform expands coverage to more low-income,

working families. Benefits could one day go to more middle-income families, which are also struggling to afford health insurance.

Portico started amid the federal reform talks of the Clinton administration, and people wondered then if it had a future.

"People said, 'Why are you starting this now?'" Holmgren said. "We said, 'Well, we're just going to provide this as long as we need to.'"

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