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## **Free Clinic Association announces agreement with Novartis to help low-income North Carolinians' obtain prescription medications**

Winston-Salem, N.C. – NC MedAssist, a prescription assistance program for the uninsured will have additional resources to assist North Carolinians obtain free prescription medications thanks to Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation (Novartis).

The NC MedAssist program is a new initiative developed by the North Carolina Association of Free Clinics (NCAFC) and supported by Attorney General Roy Cooper. With the struggling job market, people are still out of work and as a result, people are without health care insurance and prescription medication benefits. The NC MedAssist program will be housed and operated out of a centralized pharmacy location - MedAssist of Mecklenburg - a community pharmacy located in Charlotte, NC.

“In these difficult financial times, too many people in North Carolina are forced to choose between paying their bills and paying for their prescriptions. We’re pleased to partner with the Free Clinics Association and pharmaceutical companies to help people get the medications they need,” said Cooper.

The goal of NC MedAssist is to simplify the process a patient must go through to receive prescription assistance from various pharmaceutical companies. Currently, patients in need of prescription assistance can access the drug manufacturers prescription assistance programs (PAP); however the process involves contacting each drug manufacturer individually, which is time consuming and paper work driven.

Novartis is stepping up to the plate and supporting NC MedAssist at a critical time, according to the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina (ESC) the state’s unemployment rate is at 10.8 percent, and this time last year the state rate was 6.6 percent. The state’s unemployment rate has been close to 11 percent since February and hasn’t changed more than a few percentage points since then.

We support providing access to medicines for the low-income uninsured across the country and welcome the opportunity to participate in this important program, said Kevin Rigby, Vice-President of Public Affairs at Novartis. “We believe that the program will demonstrate that the combination of streamlined access to prescribed medicines and patient education will result in reduced costs for the entire healthcare system.”

“We are pleased that Novartis has joined us in our mission of helping North Carolina’s uninsured,” said Jason Baisden, Executive Director of the North Carolina Association of Free Clinics. “An essential component of the NC MedAssist program is the donated medications provided by pharmaceutical companies, like Novartis. Collaborating with pharmaceutical companies and utilizing a bulk shipment process to deliver medications to a centralized location, rather than sending prescription meds to multiple sites creates a more efficient system for getting prescription medication into the hands of the uninsured.”

The NC MedAssist program will be expanding statewide by 2010 with implementation moving county by county. During the first year of the program, NC MedAssist could potentially fill 40,000 prescriptions valued at more than \$2 million for North Carolinians.

**About the North Carolina Association of Free Clinics**

The North Carolina Association of Free Clinics, founded in 1998, is a private, nonprofit, 501(c) (3) tax-exempt organization that conducts advocacy, research, public relations, resource development, training and technical assistance on behalf of its member free clinics. The North Carolina Association of Free Clinics is the largest state association with 77+ member free clinics, serving 79 counties throughout North Carolina. For more information please visit [www.ncfreeclinics.org](http://www.ncfreeclinics.org) or call 336-251-1111.

**MedAssist of Mecklenburg**

MedAssist is a community pharmacy founded in 1997 through the efforts of the Mecklenburg Medical Society Alliance with the assistance of a \$55,000 grant from the employees of Presbyterian Hospital. MedAssist has dispensed over \$30 million in free prescription medicines (AWP) for our clients. Most of the drugs are secured from the Patient Assistance Programs (PAP) available through participating pharmaceutical companies. As a result of MedAssist's positive impact on the community, it has been named as one of the top 25 non-profit organizations in Charlotte by the Charlotte Business Journal. For more information please visit [www.medassist.org](http://www.medassist.org) or call 704-536-1790.