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WILLIAMS CALLS FOR BLUE RIBBON PANEL
TO SOLVE HEALTH CARE CRISIS

San Diego County Supervisor Leon L. Williams has called for the creation of a "blue ribbon" commission of employers, business leaders, ~~and~~ health care and insurance providers ~~to~~ who will focus ~~attention~~ on the county's health care needs, costs and delivery systems.

Williams said the commission will be asked to assist the County Board of Supervisors in developing a health policy which addresses the rising health care costs and prioritizing the need for services at a time when the state is shifting its responsibility ~~to~~ OF FUNDING ~~adequately fund~~ health care programs to the counties.

"We must take immediate action to redesign our drastically under-funded health care system, as well as ADDRESS a host of other issues which are directly related to the quality of life for this region," said Williams.

Williams' call for the panel is a result of what County officials cite as the state's continuing failure to provide adequate funds for medical and other services.

In 1983, the County agreed to deliver health care to the medically indigent

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provided that the state would pay its share. When programs were transferred to the County, state funding began to drop. In 1988-89, the state paid $41 million toward medically indigent adult services and $27 million in 1990-91, requiring the Supervisors to "backfill" from an already lean budget and for local hospitals to write off $70 million in costs in 1990 alone.

"It is appalling that although San Diego is the state's second largest County, it ranks 56 among 58 counties in terms of the share of general funds which it receives from the state," Williams said. "We receive $173 per person while Los Angeles receives $268 and the statewide average is $236. If San Diego County received the statewide average, we would have an additional $100 million to provide services."

Not content to wait for a judicial solution, Williams says the answer to the County's health care needs lies in "the collaboration of business and community leaders to work together to reduce costs, attract new monies and to use our existing resources more efficiently. We must educate the public to develop more healthful lifestyles and provide information which is multi-lingual and culturally appropriate."

Specific attention should be focused on the needs of the underclass and ethnic minorities, Williams said. "Ethnic minorities lack access ~~the~~ to health care," he said. "Prevention strategies must be developed in all major areas which focus on excess death and unnecessary morbidity of ethnic minorities within our community."

In 1987, infant mortality for African Americans in San Diego County was nearly twice that of Caucasians. ~~and~~ Black and Hispanic women with breast cancer is 20 percent greater than Caucasian women. "These ~~tea~~ trends are unacceptable to all of the citizens of San Diego County", williams said.