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**INDEPENDENT LENS PRESENTS ACCLAIMED FILM *THE WAITING ROOM*,
AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE STATE OF THE NATION'S HEALTH CARE
CRISIS TOLD THROUGH 24 HOURS IN A PUBLIC HOSPITAL ER**

***The Waiting Room* Premieres on Monday, October 21, 2013 at 10 PM ET as
Part of the First PBS Indies Showcase**

*"Memorable. Haunting. Engrossing. Should be required viewing by the
Supreme Court." - Ann Hornaday, Washington Post*

(San Francisco, CA) – *The Waiting Room* is an extraordinary immersive documentary that goes behind the doors of Oakland's Highland Hospital, a safety-net hospital fighting for survival while weathering the storm of a persistent economic downturn. Stretched to the breaking point, Highland is the primary care facility for 250,000 patients of nearly every nationality, race, and religion, with 250 patients — most of them uninsured — crowding its emergency room every day. Using a blend of cinema verité and characters' voiceover, the film offers a raw, intimate, and often uplifting look at how patients, staff and caregivers cope with disease, bureaucracy, frustration, hope and hard choices during one typically hectic day. A film by Peter Nicks, *The Waiting Room* premieres on *Independent Lens* on Monday, October 21, 2013, 10-11:30 PM ET as part of the first PBS Indies Showcase ([check local listings](#)).

The film weaves together several stories from the hundreds being played out in the waiting room: a frightened child with a dangerous case of strep throat, a young man with a testicular tumor in desperate need of surgery, as well as those suffering from chronic conditions such as alcohol and drug abuse, heart disease, and diabetes. Young victims of gun violence take their turn alongside artists and uninsured small business owners. Steel workers, cab drivers and international asylum seekers crowd the halls.

We also meet the overwhelmed hospital staff who cope with under-staffing, insufficient beds, and a never-ending stream of ER patients who jump to the head of the line of those sitting in the waiting room. As one doctor says, Highland is "the institution of last resort for so many people."

The Waiting Room lays bare the struggle and determination of both a community and an institution functioning with limited resources and no road map for navigating a health care landscape marked by historic economic and political dysfunction. Through this story of one hospital and its multifaceted community, the film powerfully and poignantly illustrates the common vulnerability to illness that binds us together as humans.

Visit the *The Waiting Room* companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/waiting-room>), which features information about the film, including an interview with the filmmaker and links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

Director's Statement from Peter Nicks

The Waiting Room presents a composite day in the life of patients at Highland Hospital in Oakland, California, edited from five months of filming in 2010. This film developed from stories my wife, a speech pathologist at Highland Hospital, told me about the struggles and resilience of her patient population. And a few years ago, as the contentious vote for health care reform got louder, it occurred to me that the people who were not participating in the debate were the very people we were fighting over: those stuck in waiting rooms at underfunded public hospitals all over the country. How would the patients in the waiting room at Highland Hospital respond to President George W. Bush's statement, echoed by many others, that we already have universal health care in this country because, by law, nobody can be turned away from an emergency room for lack of ability to pay?

By following the caregivers and patients as they passed through the waiting room, we felt we could shed some light on the challenges of delivering primary health care in an environment designed for emergency medicine. What we found was that the uninsured were more likely to be hospitalized for avoidable conditions because there is virtually no continuity of care — no regular doctor to get a detailed medical history and then a follow-up visit to make sure the prescribed treatment is working. And because the wait times are so long — both in the emergency department and to see a doctor in the clinics — simple conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes can escalate to severe life-threatening emergencies like strokes or kidney failure. These true emergencies end up back in the emergency department but at a much higher personal and financial cost.

The Waiting Room is a story and a symbol of our national community and how our common vulnerability to illness binds us together as humans.

About the Participants

Patients

Deja Bruce is a young girl who has arrived in the emergency room with her father **Demia Bruce**, suffering from a severe infection that has swollen her entire face and raised her temperature to nearly 104 degrees. Demia has gone a year without a job and for the first time has to depend upon someone else to provide health care for his daughter.

Eric Morgan arrived at the hospital with his caring girlfriend and a recent diagnosis of testicular cancer. Since he has no insurance he is at the mercy of local hospitals to provide the urgent care he needs.

Davelo Lujan has returned with terrible back pain caused by bone spurs, yet because he works as an independent contractor laying carpets he is unable to afford health insurance.

Carl Connelly is back in the ER. He's been there before. This time, doctors likely saved his life. He may return again. But for Carl the ER is his last resort.

Barbara Johnson is a diabetic senior citizen who might be invisible if it were not for a remarkable nurse who treats her with the care and attention one would expect from family.

Caregivers

Certified Nurse Assistant Cynthia Y. Johnson is the scene-stealing triage nurse who defies all expectations, managing the entire waiting room and putting patients at ease, often disarming their anger as they labor through the often infuriating system.

Dr. Douglas White, the determined and calm emergency room doctor, juggles an influx of uninsured patients, providing a remarkable level of attention to each patient while keeping things moving. But even Dr. White shows stress of a system where thousands depend upon a single emergency room for the full scope of their health care needs.

Registered Nurse Liz Lynch balances her role as caregiver, patient advocate and ER administrator who must quickly find beds for patients and cope with the crush of often-frustrated patients who continue to fill the waiting room just a few dozen feet away.

CREDITS

Director	Peter Nicks
Producers	Linda Davis, Peter Nicks and William B. Hirsh
Executive Producers	William B. Hirsh and Scott Verges
Executive Producer for ITVS	Sally Jo Fifer
Co-Producer	Lawrence Lerew
Field Producer	Emma Cott
Sound Recordist	Lawrence Lerew
Associate Producer	N'Jeri Eaton
Music	William Ryan Fritch and B. Quincy Griffin
Editor	Lawrence Lerew
Director of Photography	Peter Nicks

The Waiting Room is a co-production of Open'Hood Inc. and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) in Association with Peer Review Films with Funding Provided by the MacArthur Foundation.

About the Filmmaker

Peter Nicks (Producer/Director/Cinematographer) is an Emmy Award-winning documentary filmmaker who has produced projects for network, cable and public television exploring topics such as immigration, journalism and technology. He has also directed media strategy for two social networking start-ups and developed transmedia storytelling projects that make use of emerging social media platforms. He worked as a staff producer for ABC News in New York and as a producer for the innovative PBS documentary series *Life 360*. Peter Nicks earned his Masters in documentary filmmaking from the University of California, Berkeley in 1999. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife and two children.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The senior series producer is Lois Vossen. More information at www.pbs.org/independentlens. Join *Independent Lens* on Facebook at www.facebook.com/independentlens.

About PBS Indies Showcase

As part of its commitment to provide viewers with year-round access to the creative work of independent filmmakers, the **PBS Indies Showcase** is scheduled during the weeks between the seasons of the award-winning series *POV* and *Independent Lens* and will feature films from both. While PBS features the work of independent filmmakers throughout the year, the Showcase is designed to spotlight their work and increase audience visibility for this important genre.

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