

Consumer Voices for Coverage

Strengthening State Advocacy Networks to Expand Health Coverage

CVC News and Notes

March 2009

Mark Your Calendars!

CVC Annual
Meeting

Sept 30-Oct 2

Back to
Philadelphia!

More info to come!

News from the Beltway

In recent weeks, there has been much activity around health care on the federal level. Community Catalyst's National Health Reform Team has sent announcements with updates, resources, and considerations for states, and will continue to contact our state partners with important information as the debate continues.

Updates



New Appointees
Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius has been nominated to be the next secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

For information on Gov. Sebelius' connection to Community Catalyst, please [click here](#).

In This Newsletter

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Nancy-Ann DeParle, former head of the Health Care Finance Administration (now CMS) under President Clinton, has been appointed to lead the White House Office on Health Reform.

National Health Care Reform

On March 5, President Obama convened the White House Summit on Health Reform. The event was described as the official kickoff of the administration's health reform effort. During his speech, Obama reiterated his commitment to sign and enact comprehensive health reform legislation this year. He also recognized the strong efforts from and progress made on the state level:

This time, the call for reform is coming from the bottom up, from all across the spectrum – from doctors, nurses and patients; unions and businesses; hospitals, health care providers and community groups. It's coming from mayors, governors and legislatures – Democrats and Republicans – who are racing ahead of Washington to pass bold health care initiatives on their own.

- President Barack Obama, March 5, 2009

available on [C-SPAN](#).

On the same day, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services unveiled their new website dedicated to health reform, www.healthreform.gov. It includes reports from all 50 states on the Health Care Community Discussions that took place in December 2008.

Resources (FMAP & COBRA)

If you are interested in knowing your states estimated Medicaid assistance through 2011, please review this information provided by the Kaiser Family Foundation's [State Health Facts](#).

Resources are available to assist states in learning how they can obtain the subsidies for health care coverage promised to the unemployed in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Families USA has produced a helpful document which focuses on state legislation, [Understanding COBRA and Mini-COBRA Premium Assistance](#). The Chicago Tribune also published [an article](#) that explains what individuals can do to ensure they receive their subsidies.

Please continue to look for national updates from Community Catalyst's National Health Reform Team. If you have not received these updates and wish to do so, or if you have any questions about federal legislation and national health care reform, please contact Jennifer Collier at jcollier@communitycatalyst.org.

New legislative sessions underway

With a new president in the White House with a progressive prospective on health reform on the national stage, CVC grantees want to ride the wave of opportunity to also bring change in their own states. Below are some highlights from the frontlines. As you review the efforts of other states we encourage you to contact your peers for additional information.

- California is leading support to standardize benefits plans offered by insurers, require broker fiduciary duty and transparency to consumers, and limit the amount an emergency room can charge uninsured patients with incomes below 350 percent FPL.
- Colorado is supporting a provider fee that would be used to expand children's and adults' coverage, removing one of the many constraints on Colorado's budget, and preventing cutbacks in public programs.
- Illinois is emphasizing the federal-state partnership and leveraging state funding for FMAP and SCHIP, while working to create a reinsurance program to provide coverage for individuals under 250 percent and small business owners. Illinois advocates are also supporting important insurance market reforms.
- Maine is also working on a transparency agenda, which would standardize how insurance companies and providers report cost and quality to the public.
- Maryland is working on protecting the governor's Working Families and Small Business Health Care Coverage Act of 2007, which raised Medicaid eligibility to 116 percent FPL and last year parents became eligible.
- Children's health is big on the agenda in Minnesota, where they are working on the Health Security Act. It is seen as a pathway to universal coverage, as it would cover all children by 2010 and eventually all adults. Minnesota is also working on the Kids Coverage and Reducing Barriers to Health Bill.
- New Jersey has adopted a cost and quality agenda that includes medical homes, prescription drug issues, preferred drug lists and/or health IT.
- New York wants to continue the simplification of public insurance programs by: eliminating face-to-face applications, the asset test for adults and finger-printing. They are also working to reform the NYS insurance market and Expanding Family Health Plus to 200 percent FPL.
- Ohio want to fix unfair insurance rules, develop a fair financing mechanism for health care and increase transparency, quality and cost effectiveness.
- In Oregon: "Our goal is to work together for a Healthy Oregon and build a health system that is Sustainable, Available, Funded and Effective."
- Pennsylvania wants to expand and improve its adultBasic Program, which provides health insurance for the state's uninsured working-age adults.
- Washington is working on establishing in state law the goal of achieving quality, affordable health care for all residents by 2012. This bill works to maximize all federal funding possibilities and utilize

2008 economic analysis of reform proposals showing that there are viable options for health care reform in the state.

What is affordable coverage?

Advocates in three CVC states launched affordability projects to craft new tools to use on behalf of consumers. In Colorado, New Jersey, and Ohio, grantees developed surveys and administered them at workshops across their states to pinpoint how much families can afford to pay for health insurance. After collecting raw data, they are using these numbers to justify robust subsidies for low and middle income families when individual mandates are enacted and to fight increased cost-sharing in state health insurance programs. If you are interested in hearing more about these projects, please contact your field coordinator.

CVC "Connects" with their delegations in D.C.

As part of RWJF's Connect Project, many CVC grantees traveled through a Spring storm to Washington, D.C. earlier this month to discuss health care reform with policymakers from their states.

Grantees took the opportunity to make specific requests of their senators and representatives to engage constituents on health advocacy and build relationships with the Hill staff. Successful asks included:

- Attending town hall meetings
- Writing Op-Eds
- Participating in health care forums
- Meeting with small business owners
- Participating in report releases
- Connecting with constituents in their Districts

The Connect Project focuses on helping grantees build and enhance relationships with their members of congress and other policymakers to help further their work and position grantees as resources on the most pressing health care issues of the day.

Spotlight on Leilani Bonnell

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Leilani Bonnell is the state field director for the Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage, a position she took on in January with UHCAN Ohio. In her position, she is in charge of organizing the OHC field work and coordinating the regional grassroots organizers. Prior to joining UHCAN Ohio, Bonnell worked as a regional director for the Ohio Democratic Party, where she was responsible for 26 counties. A lifelong advocate, Bonnell believes she gained her political activism skills from her mother, who saw advocacy as a way for social change. In the 20 years she has been an advocate, Bonnell said the highlight of her career so far was working to help elect then-candidate Barack Obama, and she hopes he will keep his promise on health care now that he is in the White House.

"To help folks lead the way for health reform, we need to stay focused," Bonnell said. "We can't fix the economy without health care being in the mix."

When she is not building the health care movement, Bonnell likes to garden and hike. She is married to her high school sweetheart, James Bonnell, and they have three children, Alexandra, Danielle and Cassandra, who is expecting Bonnell's first grandchild at the end of March.