

# MassHealth, Commonwealth Care and Commonwealth Choice Enrollment Outreach Grants Office of Community Programs-Commonwealth Medicine – University of Massachusetts Medical School

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## Objective

To identify education, outreach and enrollment strategies among FY 07 grant funded organizations that demonstrate the greatest promise as a "best" or "most effective" practice

## Purpose and Background

- In mid-2006, a state survey estimated that 372,000 Massachusetts residents were uninsured. The goal of Chapter 58 Health Care Reform Law is to reduce the percentage of uninsured by expanding access to both public and private insurance coverage
- To assist the State reach this goal, the MassHealth and Commonwealth Care Enrollment Outreach Grant Project was implemented. 3.5 million dollars was allocated to support outreach and enrollment efforts in FY 07
- 35 organizations were selected by the Office of Medicaid to receive outreach and enrollment grants
- In addition to grant management, training and program evaluation, the Office of Community Programs of Commonwealth Medicine was asked to document "best" or most effective practices that demonstrated promise for replication by grant funded organizations in FY 08

## Methods

Several methods were used to collect effective outreach practices:

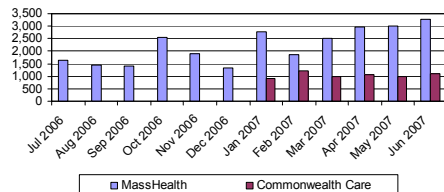
- Analyses of monthly reports submitted by grant funded organizations
- Review and analyses of data collected during round table discussions by outreach workers at an "Outreach Summit" sponsored by the Office of Medicaid and the Massachusetts Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation
- Analyses of final project poster presentations prepared by each grant funded organizations

## Results

Results indicate that effective outreach practices can be classified into six principle categories:

- Community outreach workers, who are members of the community served, share cultural values, language, background, perceptions of the health care system report that these shared factors create an atmosphere of trust that engages and supports community members through the enrollment process
- Clear, simple and consistent written and oral communication methods that are sensitive to language and literacy level of the populations served are essential. This communication is most effective when conducted through personal, one to one interactions
- Completing the enrollment process in the community, utilizing the Virtual Gateway, lap top computers and other electronic equipment is time efficient and highly successful
- Innovative one time or short term events or media strategies attract the attention and engagement of local communities (Stickers of newspaper, My Space webpage featuring information about new insurance options). By raising community awareness through multiple venues, community members are most likely to investigate the new State insurance programs
- Integration of outreach efforts within the sponsoring organization provides opportunities for the outreach workers to assist the applicant to access primary care services. Many outreach workers report providing follow-up after enrollment and case management
- Outreach workers that develop the most sensitive and thoughtful strategies in response to identified barriers are most likely to increase engagement of community members
- The State and local partnerships created through the outreach grants is an effective way to advance and implement public policy through outreach and enrollment services that provide an immediate and direct benefit to Massachusetts residents

MassHealth and Commonwealth Care Approved Applications



## Conclusions

State, Federal and private health insurance requirements and enrollment process are complex. To successfully enroll many eligible individuals one needs to understand program eligibility requirements, how these requirements relate to their personal or family background and circumstances, where to receive assistance and the consequences of not being insured under the new health care reform law to overcome barriers that may impede the process. For many individuals one-to-one assistance is needed

- Under each broad category of effective outreach practices there are many noteworthy examples of community health approaches that merit further investigation, especially if the State wishes to replicate these efforts as widely accepted "best" practices
- Defining the terms "best" or "effective" practice as interpreted by the parties involved, State agencies and the organizations doing the enrollment. While enrollment in a health insurance program may be considered a desired outcome by all parties, it is not likely to be the only outcome and certainly not the most important outcome
- The most salient outcome is access to health care services, also defined as utilization of the health insurance benefits. It is also critical that these services result in improved health outcomes for the newly enrolled individual and reduced health care costs for the State
- Further research about "best" outreach and enrollment practices is needed to further inform future state funded outreach and enrollment projects

## Policy Implications

- Since July 2006, 175,000 individuals have received health insurance. Of these newly insured individuals approximately 32,000 individuals received education and enrollment assistance from outreach workers representing community and provider organizations that participated in the Commonwealth Care Enrollment Outreach Grant Project
- As a result of the project's success an additional 3.5 million dollars was allocated for outreach and enrollment assistance for FY 08. Even after the State reaches its health insurance enrollment goals, many individuals will continue to need assistance to remain insured in a very complex system. Continuous funding for outreach and enrollment grants is needed to assist newly eligible individuals and previously insured individuals to maintain the state's health care reform goals
- Preliminary investigation of "best" outreach and enrollment practices, demonstrates that the support and assistance provided by outreach workers to enroll in health insurance extends beyond health insurance enrollment. As the first point of contact for individuals who are uninsured, outreach workers become trusted allies who not only assist with enrollment but who also provide education and initial support to newly insured individuals
- Outreach grants to community organizations provide an opportunity for the State and local communities to work together to reach State goals. Maintaining these financial resources will help to maintain these relationships over time building a lasting community state partnership

*There are four reasons why individuals don't access healthcare programs. One, they don't know that these programs exist; two, if they know they exist they don't think that they themselves are eligible; third, the administrative complexity of applying; and fourth is stigma. We have to overcome all those barriers if we're going to reach everyone to get them enrolled."*

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