Medicaid Expansion Advocacy Campaign: Tips for Getting Active

Medicaid Expansion and the HCH Community
As of May 2014, 26 states and the District of Columbia have expanded Medicaid to those earning up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Coverage started on January 1, 2014, and millions now have affordable health coverage. For low-income uninsured residents of the 24 states who have not chosen to expand Medicaid – including hundreds of thousands of people experiencing homelessness – January 1, 2014 meant very little.

The Affordable Care Act only provides financial assistance to purchase private insurance for those earning between 100-400% FPL, as it originally intended for all states to expand Medicaid to cover those earning less than 138% FPL (with the 100%-138% being an overlap group). Hence, states that opt out of Medicaid expansion leave about five million people in a ‘coverage gap’: too poor to receive subsidies through the federal health insurance marketplace and not eligible for Medicaid. This was not the intent of the ACA.

Thankfully, there are strong moral and economic arguments in favor of expansion. The expanded Medicaid benefit is fully federally funded for the first few years (then gradually reduced to 90% federal funds in 2020 and beyond). States have the opportunity to access billions in federal dollars with limited state investment. Some states may even see savings thanks to additional tax revenue and economic activity. Beyond financing, Medicaid expansion saves lives, which is a compelling moral justification.

The HCH Community has a significant role in advocating for Medicaid expansion. Most people served at HCH projects have income under 100% FPL and therefore fall in the ‘coverage gap.’ This patient population has significant health needs that are difficult to treat (or resolve) without comprehensive health coverage. Governors, legislators, and other policymakers need to hear how their decisions are impacting the most vulnerable people in our community. Remember, nonprofit staff are legally allowed to spend a small portion of their time lobbying for policy change (still check with your supervisor!). Use the suggestions below to get more involved in Medicaid expansion advocacy.

Join a coalition:
The easiest way to get involved in Medicaid expansion advocacy is to join a coalition already working on this issue. Medicaid expansion is important to many different stakeholders beyond the homeless health care community so you are not alone in this effort! A state-wide or city-wide coalition will have people focusing on this issue who can be a big resource to you.

- Review the organizations listed in the resources section at the end of this guide.
- Contact your Primary Care Association to see if they are working with any coalitions.
- Try searching the internet if all else fails. A search term of ‘Medicaid expansion advocacy [your state/area]’ will probably find one.
- Sign up for a coalition’s email lists to get information on pending legislation, upcoming events and opportunities to take action.
- Contact the coalition directly to see how you can get involved.
**Speak out:**
Public officials are very sensitive to public opinion. Make sure they know that you and your colleagues support Medicaid expansion.

- Call your state legislator(s) and Governor’s office and express support for Medicaid expansion. State coalitions can help you know when to call, but anytime is a good time to voice your opinion.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper supporting Medicaid expansion.
- Use social media to express support for Medicaid expansion. You can post on your elected officials’ Facebook pages or tweet at them for added public impact.
- State coalitions can help determine when public hearings are being held. Use these opportunities to testify. They are open to the public and are held specifically to elicit community opinion. Go as a group with other colleagues.

**Use your experience in your advocacy:**
Providers and consumers have front-line experience with the consequences of having poor access to health care. Many public officials don’t have that experience. Use what you have learned in your work to illustrate why your state should expand Medicaid—it might be the first time they’ve considered how this issue impacts people experiencing homelessness.

- Tell personal stories of how a lack of health coverage has made your life or your work more difficult. These stories are a powerful way to make your point.
- Provide examples of how increased access to health insurance would remove barriers and improve treatment of those served at your project.
- Find out if leadership at your project has any data on how your project would benefit from Medicaid expansion. Would you open new sites or create new jobs?
- If you want to use numbers, statewide enrollment and financial statistics such as those provided by Kaiser are helpful, but your best argument is how it will impact real people and your community.

**Engage others at your project:**
There is power in numbers and everyone has a unique story to tell. Facilitate involvement among staff and consumers at your project to make a larger impact.

- Get buy-in from your project’s leadership and/or Board. See if they would endorse Medicaid expansion and help promote advocacy involvement among others. Remember, 501(c)3 organizations (most nonprofits and HCH grantees are 501(c)3s) are legally able to lobby for policy change!
- Work with your partners to plan a lobby day if your clinic is near the capital.
- Develop easy ways to get involved. Organize a petition or a letter writing campaign, or join one from a coalition.
- Engage consumers. Identify consumers at your project who would be eligible for Medicaid if your state expanded and help them get engaged. Provide any needed training and support so that they can speak out about their experiences.
- Registering to vote through the online marketplace application is another engagement opportunity. (You might not get insurance, but you can still register to vote!)
Determine what reforms are acceptable:
Some states (Arkansas, Iowa, Michigan) have had waivers approved for alternative Medicaid expansions. Those states that have not yet expanded are likely to consider some of these reforms as they debate whether to move forward. Advocates need to know what they can live with and what reforms are unacceptable. Again, state coalitions can help you.

- A main tenet of some reforms has been to use Medicaid dollars to purchase private health insurance for new beneficiaries. This can be ok, but the devil is in the details.
- Consider the impact on people experiencing homelessness. Enrollment processes should be simple. Make sure policymakers consider those who lack a home mailing address, access to computers, and other resources.
- Minimize cost-sharing (e.g., for prescriptions) to the greatest extent possible.

Medicaid Expansion Advocacy Case Study
Fourth Street Clinic, Salt Lake City, UT

Fourth Street Clinic is the only HCH project in Utah, serving about 4,200 homeless patients in 2013. Shortly after the 2012 Supreme Court decision, they released a statement supporting Medicaid expansion in Utah. Fourth Street collaborated closely with Utahans for Medicaid Expansion, a state-wide coalition supporting Medicaid expansion, as well as the Primary Care Association and other allies. Through their concerted efforts, Fourth Street Clinic CEO Kristy Chambers was named to serve on the Governor’s Medicaid Expansion Task Force. The Task Force met throughout the summer of 2013 and released its report later that year. Based in part on the report, the Governor decided he would seek to expand Medicaid through premium assistance and announced that decision at a press conference at Fourth Street Clinic. The Consumer Advisory Board at Fourth Street took the Governor on a tour, presented him with a letter supporting Medicaid expansion and shared their own health care stories with him. While there is still a great deal of work to do in order to get legislative approval for Medicaid expansion, it is clear that HCH advocacy has been essential to building the support within the state and the Governor’s Administration.

Using Fourth Street’s advocacy success as one approach, here are some strategies to consider when planning your own approach:

- Educate your Board about Medicaid expansion and obtain an endorsement.
- Engage your Consumer Advisory Board in the advocacy effort. Their personal stories can be more compelling than the economic argument.
- Provide media and communications training to both Board and CAB members.
- Use the media to educate the public on the importance of Medicaid expansion.
- Participate in state task forces and work groups.
- Invite officials for a tour.
Resources:
Below are is a short list of state-wide and metropolitan Medicaid expansion coalitions. Please also use the Council as a resource. Visit our State Medicaid Advocacy Page for more resources. Contact Dan Rabbitt at drabbitt@nhchc.org for additional support.

- **Florida**: Healthcare for Florida-NOW: [http://healthcareforflorida.org/medicaidcoalition](http://healthcareforflorida.org/medicaidcoalition)
- **Georgia**: Cover Georgia: [http://www.coverga.org/](http://www.coverga.org/)
- **Indiana**: Cover Indiana: [http://www.coverindiana.org/](http://www.coverindiana.org/)
- **Maine**: Cover Maine Now: [http://covermainenow.com/](http://covermainenow.com/)
- **Missouri**: Missouri Medicaid Coalition: [http://www.momedicaidcoalition.org/](http://www.momedicaidcoalition.org/)
- **Pennsylvania**: Pennsylvania Health Access Network: [https://pahealthaccess.org/CovertheCommonwealth](https://pahealthaccess.org/CovertheCommonwealth)
- **Texas**: Cover Texas Now: [http://www.covertexasnow.org/](http://www.covertexasnow.org/)
- **Virginia**: Healthcare for All Virginians: [http://havcoalition.org/](http://havcoalition.org/)

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