

# Consumer Voices for Coverage

## Strengthening State Advocacy Networks to Expand Health Coverage

# News & Notes March 11, 2008

### How Does the Changing Political and Economic Environment Affect our Work?

As we move through the 2008 legislative session, we are confronted with several obstacles to achieving significant breakthroughs on coverage at the state level. First, the weakening economic environment reduces state tax collections while increasing the demand for state services. The resulting budget gaps tend to put a chill on bold plans for health reform; certainly one contributing cause to the failure of the California legislation early this year. Second, there is tremendous uncertainty about the direction of federal health policy and some states will want to take a “wait and see approach.” Generally during a significant election year there is less room for compromise as well as a desire by legislators to be out campaigning rather than in state houses legislating. Finally, the Bush administration’s proposals to change certain Medicaid reimbursement policies only add to the fiscal pressure and uncertainty in states. As a result, very few states will be in a position to make progress this year.

Given all this, it’s important to keep a few things in mind as we go about our work. First, the core of CVC is to build consumer voice which is important in all environments—favorable and unfavorable. By strengthening our organizations now, we can help stop the erosion of coverage and put ourselves in the position to capitalize on opportunities to make progress when they present themselves (and they will). Which brings us to the second point—Consumers Voices for Coverage is a three-year initiative. State groups should not hesitate to see this year as the time to lay the foundation for future efforts. Depending on the outcome of the national elections we could easily see states in a position to make major progress by 2010.

### Your Strategic Communications Plan: The First Step

One capacity building issue common across the twelve grantee sites is the need to strengthen communications infrastructure and to develop and deepen messaging capacity. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is conducting a survey of CVC grantees to assist our efforts to help you develop a strategic communications plan to guide your work under the CVC grant and support you in your goals.

Please complete this survey by Tuesday, March 18. If you experience any technical difficulties related to the survey or have general questions or comments, please contact Talia Whyte at 617-275-2909 at Community Catalyst or Sejal Shah at GMMB (sejal.shah@gmmb.com, 202-572-2804).

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=d6h727Kav3xp9kzgfTl5jw\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=d6h727Kav3xp9kzgfTl5jw_3d_3d)

Field coordinators will schedule a follow up discussion about the audit results with the communications consultants and grantees as the starting point for developing your individual communications workplans.

### Announcements

#### Upcoming Conference Calls

***Evaluation Conference Call (for CVC Grantees and Leadership Team members)***

Monday March 24<sup>th</sup> 1:00 – 2:00

***Cost Containment Strategies: An Overview***

Thursday April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1:00 – 2:00

#### CVC Advisory Committee

Please let your field coordinator know, if you are interested in being on the CVC Advisory Committee. This is an important opportunity for CVC grantees to provide advice about the program.

## CVC Launch Catches Media Attention

A number of our colleagues received great press coverage of the official launch of their CVC Project. Below is a sampling of some of the coverage.

Portland Press Herald

<http://news.mainetoday.com/updates/021899.html>

Statesman Journal

<http://www.statesmanjournal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080207/NEWS/802070316/1001>

Washington Business Journal

[http://www.bizjournals.com/washington/stories/2008/02/04/daily39.html?ana=from\\_rss](http://www.bizjournals.com/washington/stories/2008/02/04/daily39.html?ana=from_rss)

Real Change News

[http://www.realchangenews.org/2008/2008\\_02\\_13/healthcare\\_v15n08.html](http://www.realchangenews.org/2008/2008_02_13/healthcare_v15n08.html)

## Health Care for All New York Campaign

Each month we will focus on the work in one or more CVC state and profile one of the advocates. This month we feature New York.



CVC Lead Staff: Elisabeth Benjamin  
Director, Healthcare Restructuring Initiatives for  
Community Service Society of New York.  
[ebenjamin@cssny.org](mailto:ebenjamin@cssny.org)  
212-614-5461

Elisabeth is a well-known healthcare consumer advocate for low-income people in New York City. She litigated significant federal and state cases

which resulted in the restoration of Medicaid eligibility to nearly 150,000 legal immigrant New Yorkers. In 2004, she was named a "Health Care Hero" in New York's Westsider community newspaper.

As a health specialist, Elisabeth worked in various community health and hospital projects in India, the Philippines, Morocco, Tunisia and the United States. In 1991 and 1992, Elisabeth was involved in legal missions to post-war Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. In 2003, she returned to Iraq to work on a humanitarian assessment which was published in The Lancet.

When asked what health advocacy topics she especially likes to discuss, Elisabeth responded, "how to achieve health care for all without an individual mandate." Feel free to email Elisabeth about this, or other questions you have about the exciting work going on in New York.

In her 'spare' time, she likes to play with her two year old twin daughters and sleep!!!

## A Snapshot into the Health Care for all New York Campaign

In late February, Health Care For All New York (HCFANY) held their kick off meeting in Albany. Attached are some of the materials used by HCFANY to help recruit and educate health and social justice groups about their campaign, including:

- Standards for Universal Health Care:
- Campaign meeting agenda
- Campaign recruitment and sign on form
- Personal story collection form
- Fact Sheet on New York Uninsured
- Health Care Insurance Reform: What's Bad for Massachusetts is Worse for New York\*
- HCFANY comments on the NY 2008-2009 Executive Budget.