

Western Massachusetts

Health Access Network Notes



COMMUNITY PARTNERS, INC.

January 4, 2008
Jones Library – Amherst, MA

ISSUES & OBSERVATIONS:

A summary of new program information, observations, upcoming events, job & training opportunities shared by HAN members

MassHealth/Commonwealth Care

Outreach

Enrollment counselors were swamped with calls from people wanting to enroll at the very end of December. They are continuing to receive many new clients.

- There is concern that radio ads from private plans gave the wrong impression that people could enroll up to the last minute and still be covered by Dec. 31. One outreach worker was receiving phone messages at 7 pm on New Year's Eve.
- Many last-minute walk-in applicants came in who had been referred from the Connector's "Connect to Health" enrollment events. Quite a few brought documents they had been told were necessary, which was helpful.

Mandate penalty for 2008

- A lot of people still don't understand that they will be losing their personal tax exemption for 2007, and what this means.
- It has been rumored that the enrollment deadline has been extended to February 1. This rumor is false; the deadline was December 31 and no grace period regarding the individual mandate has been announced.
- The process for people who do not have insurance but need a waiver is very confusing, even for people with a lot of experience filling out forms.
- Healthy Connections in Orange is creating an instructional video for cable access TV explaining the Schedule HC tax form and the mandate penalty, among other things.

Program Info & Updates

Medicare

The new application for the Low-Income Subsidy (LIS) program offering extra help paying for prescription drugs application has been released. If you have any of the old ones, recycle them. The new ones reflect the current resource levels. These applications can be submitted online at www.ssa.gov.

Anyone eligible for Medicare who needs help with prescription drug coverage can contact SHINE: 1-800-AGE-INFO / 1-800-243-4636.

The general enrollment period for Medicare A and B is from January 1 – March 31, with an effective date of July 1. Anyone who did not sign up when they first became eligible can do so now at www.ssa.gov.

Department of Public Health, Refugee and Immigrant Health Program

The number of Southeast Asian and Eastern Europeans coming into Western Massachusetts is dwindling. New groups anticipated include Burmese and people from different parts of the African continent. Iraqis are also expected, some who speak Arabic, others who speak Chaldean, including Christian Iraqis coming through Turkey and elsewhere. There will be new language needs.

Resources & Events

SHINE has been working with a multicultural task force to plan a conference for elders on March 15 at Elms College in Chicopee. The conference will focus on Vietnamese, Spanish-speaking, Russian, and Portuguese-speaking elders, and will have breakout rooms where materials are disseminated in various languages. If you are interested, please get in touch with Jessica Dupont at (413) 750-2893 for the appropriate materials.

The Massachusetts Community Health Worker Alliance (MCHWA) is looking at the possibility of credentialing/certification program for outreach workers throughout the state. MCHWA will be hosting town hall meetings very soon across the state to get input from people who are doing the work about what a certification program should look like and whether we should we have one. MCHWA plans to report back to the legislature in June.

Workgroups will be convened in Boston about funding and training for CHWs. For information about joining a workgroup (it's possible to call in), call Lisa Renee Holderby at 508-856-4852 or 617-524-6696 x 102.

New medical services and outreach/enrollment programs:

- Tapestry Health has a mobile health van that provides HIV counseling and testing, and will be expanding to enroll people in health services in nontraditional settings. If you would be interested in bringing the van to your area, please call (413) 586-2016 ext. 127.

- Berkshire Medical Center also has a van, with two exam rooms inside, that will be used for health and wellness outreach in Berkshire County. The van runs four days a week and will be another resource for reaching out to immigrant populations in the coming year.
- A local newspaper recently reported the Amherst Survival Center now has two doctors now offering free services a few hours a week. This may enable some people who have been leery of becoming involved in health systems to receive much-needed medical care.
- The Caring Health Center has been conducting extensive outreach for its new location in the Boston Road area of Springfield.
- Casa Latina has begun a new outreach and enrollment program, going door to door with a laptop and document scanner.

Other Issues

Western Massachusetts legislators are working on the physician shortage issue. They will welcome constituents' reality check of their legislation as they fine-tune it.