

## Western Massachusetts

# Health Access Network Notes

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COMMUNITY PARTNERS, INC.

July 6, 2007

Jones Library – Amherst, MA

### STATE PROGRAM AND POLICY NEWS:

*Jennifer Chow, Health Care For All*

*Michael thanked Stacey Auger for her three-plus years of excellent work reporting on state program and policy news for Health Care For All and welcomed Jennifer Chow, HCFA's new liaison to HAN.*

#### Health Coverage Changes

Individual Mandate: As of July 1, the Individual Mandate requires most residents to have health insurance coverage. Jen pointed out that the state will be asking people to document that they got coverage in 2007 for their 2007 tax returns, so technically people will need it by December 31. While it is okay to wait, when giving clients advice its important to remember that people need to begin the process in October or November since it will take awhile for any health plan (public or private) to process an application and start coverage.

Private insurance: The merger of Individual and Small Group markets required by health care reform also went into effect on July 1; it is expected that options for individuals will be more affordable. Jen and Michael handed out pamphlets highlighting the benefits included in the four CommChoice plans (Gold, Silver, Bronze and Young Adult).

Non-discrimination provision: Also on July 1 the non-discrimination provision put in place by health care reform legislation began requiring that employers who offer health insurance to their employees offer the same options and the same support/assistance to everyone. It was pointed out that employers can still discriminate based upon employees' seniority.

#### MassHealth

On July 1 MassHealth began collecting monthly premiums for the Children's Medical Security Plan (CMSP). Given practical considerations, MassHealth is suspending these premiums for July and August. Notices are going out at the end of July about these changes. *Meg Kroeplin* added

that anyone paying CMSP through automatic payments should ask their banks to suspend these payments. Refunds will be made for payments collected in error, but they may take months.

In addition, MassHealth will stop charging premiums for children on MassHealth when the adults in the family are enrolled in Commonwealth Care.

## State Budget

Advocacy efforts were successful, and support for community outreach and enrollment programs was fully funded at \$3.5 million, the same as last fiscal year. To everyone's surprise, the budget created a new health care reform and education unit which will be responsible for outreach coordination. No details are currently available about the new unit and how it will operate.

Other items in the budget include:

- Funding assistance for people trying to get the birth certificates for enrollment into MassHealth or Commonwealth Care required by DRA.
- Full funding for both Healthy Start and CMSP programs.
- The suspension of premiums for CMSP families under 200% FPL.
- Full funding for B.E.S.T., the Springfield-based oral health initiative.

The budget is now before the Governor; he has 10 days to veto any items. Jen and Michael reminded people that they should thank their legislators for the hard work.

## Hearings/Meetings

- July 11 – hearing about tobacco-related issues, including funding for tobacco/smoking cessation
- July 12 – Connector Board meeting. It is supposed to decide then whether people on the Insurance Partnership can move to get coverage through Commonwealth Care, and whether people who are under 300% FPL and otherwise eligible will be able to get Commonwealth Care if they cannot afford insurance offered by their employer.
- July 18 – two major hearings, one on a bill put forth by the Oral Health Advocacy Taskforce, another on Affordable Care Today (ACT!) bills
- Sept. 12 – hearing on Health Care Quality bill