

Strategies for Behavioral Health Organizations to Promote New Health Insurance Opportunities

In African American Communities

*The **Affordable Care Act (ACA)** provides new health care options for Americans. The ACA brings affordable health insurance coverage and expanded*



access to mental health and substance use disorder services to millions of Americans. Community outreach and enrollment efforts can play a vital role in making sure that uninsured individuals learn about new health insurance opportunities. Organizations, including behavioral health providers, working with African American individuals and families face unique outreach and enrollment challenges. Some of these challenges include homelessness, lower rates of health care utilization, and financial barriers such as high out-of-pocket medical expenses and prescription costs.

*This strategy brief provides **10 strategies** that your organization can use to introduce African American individuals and families to the new health insurance options. Examples are provided from organizations that have successfully used these strategies.*

Outreach and Enrollment Strategies

1 *Understand Your Community's Preferences*

There is diversity among African American communities across the nation and a one-size-fits-all approach is not likely to work. The New York State Center of Excellence for Cultural Competence, New York, conducted the Health and Wellness Photovoice Project in Northern Manhattan. The goal of this project was to better understand the preferences and needs within their community. People were provided with cameras to document their everyday lives. The stories behind the photographs helped to promote critical dialogue about important issues and generated insight into health care preferences.

2 *Provide a Personal Approach*

Provide opportunities for individuals to speak directly with staff. Encourage staff to get to know individuals, build rapport, offer to help complete applications/paperwork, answer questions, and provide easy-to-understand information. Project Brotherhood (PB),



Illinois, hosts a health clinic at a local barbershop. PB clinical staff members avoid professional distance by dressing in PB t-shirts, sweatshirts, and denim shorts. This allows for a more personal interaction with community members.

3 *Involve Community Members in Outreach*

Involve community members in your outreach and enrollment activities. Staff should reflect the population you are serving in terms of ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status. The Mental Health Association of Rochester, New York, finds that employing staff within the same communities in which they live leads to increased trust, flexibility, and knowledge of the community needs.

4 *Use Language Familiar to Your Community*

There are a number of federal and state resources available for educating individuals about health care enrollment and insurance plans. Determine if these resources can be more effective if they are adapted for your community. Translate resources into different languages or consider putting the information into a format that is more likely to be accepted in your community. A coalition of community-based organizations in Minnesota, including the Saint Paul Neighborhood Network, KFAI Community Radio, ECHO Minnesota (Emergency, Community and Health Outreach), and Confederation of Somali Community, created the Egal Shidad project. This project used folk tales and other cultural approaches to create a series of stories on Somali health. The Somali language stories were used for radio, television, and in the classroom.

5 *Engage Community Members on Their Own Terms*

Staff need to be willing to meet with individuals outside of standard working hours. Strict time limits for meetings are not helpful. Time must be given for individuals and families to understand and, if needed, work through their distrust before they are able to fully engage. MonmouthCares, Inc.,

New Jersey, and the Cape Atlantic Integrated Network for Kids, New Jersey, find that flexible scheduling is necessary when attempting to engage with individuals and families in the African American community.

6 *Make It Easy to Get Help*

Meet individuals in locations where they already are comfortable. Meeting locations need to be flexible and may include neighborhood centers, schools, and in someone's home. Village Wrap, New Jersey, provides information, services and enrollment assistance to individuals, including those who are homeless, at bus stations, parks, courtrooms, crisis centers, supermarkets, hair salons, and barber shops. Even if staff are not available on site, organizational contact information is clearly visible so that individuals can reach program staff.

7 *Integrate Your Message Into Community Events*

It is important to provide opportunities in the community for individuals to learn about and enroll in health care programs. Find ways to plan or be involved in community events and celebrations. Set up an information booth during a community event or parade, host a round table panel, provide a presentation during a community meeting, or distribute information at community centers, shelters, soup kitchens, and churches. Prime Time Sister Circles, a group intervention for improving women's health, meet in a variety of community settings nationwide and have been launched in conjunction with community health events and campaigns.

8 *Partner With Community Organizations*

Maximize your outreach through partnerships with neighborhood programs, schools, hospitals, shelters, churches, and cultural centers. Develop a relationship with leaders within your community and let them know what you are doing. Educate key community members such as church leaders, administrators at the local community center and health care facility, and other community leaders on the latest health reform information. The National Association of Pastors' Spouses, Tennessee, works with churches and religious institutions to raise awareness through health education. They also train faith leaders on health issues facing their communities.



9 *Use Media As a Resource*

Use electronic media such as emails, webpages, text messages, and social media to expand your outreach. Consider reaching audiences through local talk radio programs, television programs, church or temple newsletters, and community magazines. Media outlets geared toward African American audiences are particularly effective vehicles for outreach. The Mercer County Family Support Organization, New Jersey, uses Facebook to foster a sense of community and increase knowledge of health care opportunities among African Americans in their community.

10 *Address Barriers*

Be aware of the challenges that keep individuals in your community from receiving and understanding their health care options. Barriers can include homelessness, lack of childcare, inflexible work schedules, lack of transportation, and low levels of reading comprehension. Atlantic Cape Family Support Organization, New Jersey, makes available cell phones, snacks, literature, and games. Moreover, peer companions are able to assist in completing paperwork.

About the Strategies for Behavioral Health Organizations to Promote New Health Insurance Opportunities Series

This strategy brief is part of a series that highlights strategies that behavioral health organizations can use to disseminate information on the Affordable Care Act and help individuals with behavioral health conditions learn about health insurance opportunities. Strategy briefs are available that address strategies for working with the following communities:

- **African American,**
- **American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN),**
- **Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI),** and
- **Latino and Hispanic.**

The content for each strategy brief was developed in partnership with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration based on case studies provided by the National Latino Behavioral Health Association, National Leadership Council on African American Behavioral Health, National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association, and National Council of Urban Indian Health.

Please visit the National Network to Eliminate Disparities in Behavioral Health NNEDshare website at <http://share.nned.net> for more outreach and enrollment practices or for more information about any of the organizations featured in the series.

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Additional Resources

The Marketplace Call Center provides educational information about the Health Insurance Marketplace and assists consumers with application completion and plan selection. In addition to English and Spanish, assistance is available in more than 150 languages through an interpretation and translation service. Contact the call center at 1-800-318-2596; hearing impaired callers using TTY/TDD technology can dial 1-855-889-4325.

HealthCare.gov is the official website of the Health Insurance Marketplace, providing the latest information about health insurance coverage and enrollment.

Resources for individuals and organizations providing outreach and enrollment assistance are available at <http://marketplace.cms.gov/>.

The Center for Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight (CCIIO) provides regularly updated information on health insurance policies and regulations at <http://cms.gov/CCIIO/>.



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