

Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act helping millions of Americans access health care

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Washington, D.C. – One year ago today, President Obama signed into law the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, a historic piece of legislation that included the biggest expansion of Medicaid since its inception in 1965.

“The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is already improving the lives of millions of Americans. For too long, hard-working Americans have gone without quality coverage or without coverage at all,” said Emily Spitzer, executive director of the National Health Law Program (NHeLP). “The new law gives Americans the same health coverage that Congress gives itself while controlling health care costs in an unprecedented way.”

The law will expand Medicaid eligibility and coverage to over 16 million people—including adults without dependent children—with incomes up to 133% of the federal poverty line. Already Connecticut, Minnesota, and the District of Columbia have begun early expansion of Medicaid and expect to cover 180,000 people who were previously using state-only funds or were uninsured.

“While today is a day of celebration, it is unfortunate that some states continue to express concern about the expansion of Medicaid benefits to their marginalized populations. Medicaid is the bedrock of the American health system, and provides critical health insurance for millions of children, pregnant women, older adults, individuals with disabilities, and other vulnerable low-income populations,” said Spitzer.

“We strongly oppose efforts underway in some states to reverse the impact of the new law by cutting people or services from Medicaid,” added Spitzer. “The program is too vital to our communities to summarily slash. States have tremendous flexibility in implementing the program, and they need to work toward smart and innovative ways to ensure that their citizens receive the coverage they need.”

The new health care law, which will be implemented over several years, introduced many reforms beyond Medicaid. Other key provisions include funding for the Children’s Health Insurance Program, data collection so disparities in care can be identified and eliminated, elimination of the “donut hole” in the Medicare prescription drug program (Part D), expanded access to family planning services, greater preventive care benefits for Medicare beneficiaries, the reauthorization of the Office of Minority Health, and safeguards against abusive insurance practices by holding insurers accountable and allowing for private coverage for those with pre-existing conditions, or dependents up to age 26.

In May, NHeLP will release its wholly revised Advocate’s Guide to the Medicaid Program, which

for nearly 40 years has been an invaluable resource for policy makers, advocates, and administrators. More information on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and the Advocate's Guide can be found at www.healthlaw.org.

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Founded in 1969, the National Health Law Program works with and on behalf of limited-income people, people with disabilities, and children to improve their access to quality health care, and to enforce their legal rights to health. NHeLP works with courts, government agencies, and Congress to ensure quality health care for the most vulnerable members of our society.

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