

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan has awarded the National Health Law Program (NHeLP) a one-year \$200,000 grant to advance the participation of Medicaid beneficiaries in developing policies to improve Medicaid services and administration. Medicaid is the largest public health insurance program in the United States, insuring 51 million low-income people, including primarily children, people with disabilities, and the elderly.

The need for beneficiaries to mobilize and advocate on their own behalf is particularly urgent. Budgetary shortfalls at all levels of government are prompting ongoing cutbacks in public programs. Medicaid cost-cutting proposals include eliminating covered populations, increasing cost sharing, and shifting beneficiaries into managed care. Some states are seeking unprecedented authority from the federal government to restrict their Medicaid programs by, for example, redefining medical necessity and instituting caps on enrollment.

The NHeLP initiative will design strategies for consumers to have a say in these efforts, impact new Medicaid policy, and make informed decisions about their personal healthcare. NHeLP will create consumer training – boot camps, – how-to – manuals, tracking system systems and other tools to monitor proposed Medicaid reforms.

“Consumers have tended to take a back seat in the evolution of Medicaid policy,” says NHeLP attorney and project director Jane Perkins, “and now we have a situation which places the fate of Medicaid consumers in the hands of government administrators and private companies whose interests may not be aligned with Medicaid beneficiaries’ health care needs.”

For over 35 years, The National Health Law Program has worked on behalf of low-income individuals and with consumer advocates to improve access to public insurance coverage for families and children, people with disabilities people of color and the elderly. NHeLP’s guidances and consumer brochures have been circulated and translated into multiple languages.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation was established in 1930 – to help people help themselves through the practical application of knowledge and resources to improve their quality of life and that of future generations. – It’s programming activities center around the common vision of a world in which each person has a sense of worth; accepts responsibility for self, family, community, and societal well-being; and has the capacity to be productive, and to help create nurturing families,

responsive institutions, and healthy communities.