



Medicaid Matters for Rural America ***Strategies for Engaging Rural Constituencies***

Rural communities across America stand to benefit significantly from the Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). However, making this clear for policymakers, the media, and the general public in rural areas is a challenge. In addition, advocates are now faced with the challenge of engaging rural populations and communities around outreach and enrollment efforts for both Exchanges and the newly-eligible Medicaid expansion populations. This memo provides tips and tools for consumer health advocates interested in engaging rural populations and communities in Medicaid expansion campaigns and outreach and enrollment efforts.

Why Medicaid Matters in Rural Communities

Medicaid benefits:

- **Rural Individuals and Families.** The rural population is more likely to be older, lower income, living with disabilities, and less healthy compared to urban and suburban populations. Furthermore, many rural workers are self-employed or work as farmers or ranchers and often have less access to employer-sponsored insurance, leading to high rates of uninsurance and underinsurance.ⁱ According to the Center on Budget and Policy Prioritiesⁱⁱ, more than 2.6 million low-income individuals who live in rural America and who do not have health insurance could gain health coverage if all states expand Medicaid.
- **Rural Health Care Infrastructure.** Medicaid is crucial for the health care infrastructure in rural communities. Because of the high uninsurance and underinsurance rate, rural hospitals face much more uncompensated care. Providers often rely on Medicaid payments to cover the costs of treating many of their patients. Medicaid also funds services, such as mental health services, which would likely be otherwise unavailable in rural communities.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Rural Economies.** Medicaid dollars also contribute to the economy in rural communities. Medicaid funding benefits rural communities by supporting jobs within the rural health care sector^{iv} which accounts for around 14 percent of total employment, with hospitals being one of the biggest employers in rural areas.^v

Tips for engaging rural constituencies

Build Relationships with Local Newspapers in Rural Communities.

- Most rural communities have a weekly newspaper that covers local football games, 4-H fairs, fundraisers, elections, etc., and residents are often loyal readers.
- Building a relationship with the editor of a rural newspaper is key. This takes time, but should not be intimidating. They are often short-staffed, so compelling stories and good content are often welcome. Find out their interests, what they like to print and what their deadlines are. Become a reliable source for information and stories.

Provide opportunities and resources for rural organizations to work on statewide campaigns.

- Be mindful of the fact that rural organizations are often under-resourced with little, if any, capacity to travel across the state to engage in campaign events.
- Rural organizations often rely on coalition partners to help produce communications products, such as templates that can be altered and applied in a way that is useful for their constituents.
- The challenge for rural organizations that participate in statewide coalitions is coordinating with partners who work with an “urban” mindset and expectations. Rural groups need adequate notice to show up in urban areas for coalition meetings, and often require advanced notice and resources to transport their constituents.

Reach rural communities through radio.

- Rural workers who are on the go all day working in fields, forests, ranches, etc., do not always have time to sit down and read a newspaper or an online blog. However, they can listen to the radio throughout the day. Radio can be one of the most effective ways to reach rural populations.
- Place radio ads in rural districts or find opportunities to talk about coverage options on local shows.

Find messengers who are trusted members of the rural communities you are targeting.

- Many people in urban areas are from small, rural towns and usually still have family and friends in those towns. They can help you network in their hometowns.
- Partner with extension offices and community action agencies to do outreach and enrollment for the Medicaid population. These offices and agencies are often local, trusted sources of information.
- Local clubs, churches, chambers of commerce, and community health workers are also strategic allies who can help with outreach in rural communities.
- Organize train-the-trainer events, and grant small contracts to activate key partners.

Engage rural constituencies in a culturally sensitive way.

- Some rural constituencies do not respond to formal PowerPoint presentations and would prefer to have a discussion that is unstructured, open, flexible, and honest.

Potential partners to collaborate with in rural areas:

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| • Enroll America | • High school students | • Local restaurants |
| • Young Invincibles | • Teach for America and related organizations | • Fraternities and sororities |
| • Universities and community colleges | • Temp agencies | • VITA volunteers providing tax assistance |
| • Rural health associations | • Dollar Stores | • Community Health Corps |
| • Children's coalitions | • Thrift Stores | • AARP |
| • Speech and hearing association | • DMV | • County extension offices |
| • Head Start programs | • Boards of Education | • Small business development centers |
| • Child care centers | • United Way | • Social media |
| • Rotary clubs | • Rural media outlets | |
| • Health fairs | • Judges and juvenile court staff | |
| • Mobile health units | • Health departments | |
| • Student nurses' associations | • Libraries | |
| | • Faith organizations | |

Additional resources:

- The [Center for Rural Affairs](#) promotes policies that make health insurance affordable for rural constituencies. Visit their website for more information about the Medicaid expansion's impact.
- Read the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' [fact sheet](#) that highlights how rural America will benefit from the Medicaid expansion.
- Visit the [USDA's website](#) to find your local Cooperative Extension offices.

ⁱ Bailey, John. *Medicaid and Rural America*. Issue brief no. 15. Center for Rural Affairs, Feb. 2012. Web. <<http://files.cfra.org/pdf/Medicaid.pdf>>.

ⁱⁱ *Rural America Will Benefit from Medicaid Expansion*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Web. <<http://www.cbpp.org/files/Fact-Sheet-Rural-America.pdf>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

^{iv} *ibid*

^v *Protect Medicare Dependent Hospitals and Rural Patients*. National Rural Health Association, Web. <<http://www.ruralhealthweb.org>>