

## Grant Outcome Report

### Advocating for Consumer Coverage Rights

#### The Problem

By December 2007, a vibrant discussion of how to make health care affordable and accessible was underway in New York State and at the federal level. While health care consumers were a fundamental constituency in this discussion, their perspectives on the issues were not represented in the same manner as other key stakeholders. Consumers did not have well-financed associations—such as those representing hospitals, doctors, nurses, other providers, businesses, and insurers—to coalesce their views and bring them to the public and policymakers.

To strengthen consumer viewpoints and voices in health care reform debates across the country, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) conducted a rigorous review of proposals from nearly 50 consortiums in more than 40 states. In December 2007, RWJF awarded 12 grants, including one to Health Care for All New York (HCFANY). This \$750,000, three-year grant was intended to leverage support from other funders to educate and empower consumers in the public discussion about how best to make health care affordable and accessible to all New Yorkers.

The American Cancer Society (ACS) is one of more than 50 organizations that comprise HCFANY, a statewide coalition representing consumers in the fight for high-quality, affordable health care. ACS also serves as part of its core steering committee, which includes the Community Service Society, New York Immigration Coalition, Public Policy and Education Fund of New York, Children's Defense Fund-New York, New Yorkers for Accessible Health Coverage, Center for Working Families, and Metro New York Health Care for All. In early 2008, the HCFANY adopted 10 standards for quality, affordable health care, which formed the basis for its strategic campaign for State and federal health reform.

#### Grant Activities and Outcomes

In August 2008, NYSHealth awarded ACS a grant to help advance HCFANY's work to expand access to health care. The NYSHealth award spanned three years, during which time the Affordable Care Act (ACA) passed and HCFANY continued to expand and fight for reforms.

#### KEY INFORMATION:

**GRANTEE**

American Cancer Society, Eastern Division

**GRANT TITLE**

Consumer Voices for Coverage

**DATES**

August 7, 2008 – October 14, 2011

**GRANT AMOUNT**

\$298,078

**FUNDING**

Cost/Coverage, Solicited

Under this grant to ACS, HCFANY set out to accomplish the following goals:

- Create educational materials for consumers about health care reform;
- Identify individuals with personal stories that illustrate consumer problems with the health care system and help them share their stories;
- Train consumers about issues in health care reform and how to effectively communicate with others in their community;
- Publish short, accessible policy analyses of the issues in health reform addressed by the 10 standards;
- Build a statewide consortium of consumer groups;
- Convene regional coalitions of health care consumer groups and individual consumer activists;
- Educate groups that represent immigrant communities about issues related to health care reform and to identify and voice particular concerns that immigrant groups have as health care consumers;
- Bring consumer voices to the public through traditional news media; and
- Encourage consumers to engage directly with policymakers, present their personal stories about health care, and voice their opinions about how various health care reform proposals would impact their access to affordable, quality care.

During the first two years of the grant period, HCFANY focused on several State-level health care access opportunities, such as the Partnership for Coverage initiative and other public and commercial insurance reforms. HCFANY engaged consumers in the fight for national reform by sharing their personal stories, and provided policy commentary and briefings.

Upon passage of the ACA, HCFANY launched a strategic campaign in 2011 to shape the design and implementation of the health insurance exchange in New York, creating a new approach centered on State-level reform while also striving for comprehensive reform at the federal level.

By the end of the grant period in July 2011, HCFANY achieved the following outcomes:

- Grew to 119 organizational members representing communities throughout New York State and added key partners to the leadership team, including the Small Business Majority Foundation and the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy;



- Drew media attention to the Exchange issue, with more than a dozen newspapers editorializing on the topic, and many news outlets reporting on the development of the Exchange;
- Maintained a website ([www.HCFANY.org](http://www.HCFANY.org)) that regularly featured blog updates, HCFANY publications, consumer stories, coalition updates, breaking news, and opportunities for action; and
- Reached new audiences through its Facebook and Twitter pages.

In addition, HCFANY's work helped move important consumer protections and coverage expansion forward in New York State through its policy expertise, consumer input, media advocacy, and education for key legislators and policy staff members. HCFANY lists the following policies among their accomplishments (though HCFANY used non-NYSHealth funds to conduct activities that involve actively supporting or opposing specific pieces of legislation):

- Restored prior approval to the New York State Department Financial Services;
- Improved the Family Health Plus Employer Buy-In Program;
- Expanded COBRA from 18 to 36 months for workers who were laid off or experienced a reduction in hours;
- Enabled young adults (18–29) to remain on their parents' insurance coverage without compromising New York's guaranteed issue rules;
- Achieved 30% accountability in New York State's Charity Care Pool;
- Simplified the public insurance enrollment process;
- Expanded New York State's Child Health Plus to 400% of the federal poverty level; and
- Prevented erosion of New York's insurance consumer protections.

As a result of these policy changes, HCFANY has established itself with policymakers as a go-to voice for consumers. State decision-makers have looked to HCFANY to represent consumers throughout the implementation of the ACA. In 2010, Governor Paterson appointed HCFANY and seven HCFANY individual member organizations to his Health Reform Advisory Council. In 2011, Governor Cuomo once again invited HCFANY and several of its member organizations to join the Health Reform Stakeholder Committee. Likewise, the Republican leadership of the New York State Senate's Health and Insurance Committees seated HCFANY members at their May 2011 invitation-only roundtable to address key Exchange design questions.

## The Future

HCFANY has effectively leveraged its capacity as a coalition to generate new foundation grant money coming into the State, supporting future advocacy. This support included additional NYSHealth funding to HCFANY for a three-year period (2011-2014). This grant supports HCFANY to analyze important State

implementation issues from the perspective of consumers, including building health insurance exchanges and developing coverage options and benefit packages. In addition, HCFANY is producing educational materials that explain reform implementation in simple, accessible terms; disseminating information about reform implementation to consumers through media outreach; and convening consumer groups and educating them about reform implementation.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

### ABOUT THE GRANTEE

The American Cancer Society is a nationwide, community-based voluntary health organization dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by preventing cancer, saving lives, and diminishing suffering from cancer through research, education, advocacy, and service. The Eastern Division of the American Cancer Society employs more than 600 people between the states of New York and New Jersey. There are 20 regional offices across New York, all centers of staff member and volunteer activity around cancer awareness; education; early detection; patient service and navigation; and local and State grassroots advocacy. In the past several years, ACS has made access to health care a top priority, both nationally and in New York State, with a focus on improving the prevention, early detection, and treatment of cancer.

### GRANTEE CONTACT

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