

## Grant Outcomes Report

### Developing a Multi-Lingual Outreach and Education Campaign to Increase Immigrants' Options for Affordable Care

#### The Problem:

For low-income immigrants, New York's health care system is nearly impossible to navigate without assistance. Newcomers inevitably turn to ethnic social service organizations in the community to get answers to their many questions about how things work in America, to understand their rights, and to negotiate bureaucracies and learn about avoidable risks. Yet immigrant communities in New York lack indigenous organizations with expertise on the health care system.

Many immigrants and refugees delay getting needed health care until after a crisis arises to shield themselves from extraordinarily high health care costs and to avoid potential immigration consequences resulting from public insurance and medical debt. Far too few immigrants understand the options for affordable preventive and primary care, and delay seeking care until their conditions become serious, resulting in poorer health and more costly care down the line.

Immigration laws and policies are continuously evolving, and the rules about immigrants' rights to government programs and services have changed significantly in recent years. Very few organizations have the capacity to accurately educate individuals on basic issues such as their rights to non-emergency care, how to access services, and the potential consequences of government health insurance or medical debt for an immigrant and his or her family members and sponsor.

In response to these challenges, the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) used funding from the New York State Health Foundation (NYSHealth) to build the capacity of immigrant community organizations to address the health care needs of their constituents.

#### KEY INFORMATION:

**GRANTEE**

New York Immigration Coalition

**GRANT TITLE**

Strengthening the Capacity of Immigrant Organizations to Link Uninsured Immigrants to Health Care and Insurance

**DATES**

January 1, 2008–February 12, 2009

**GRANT AMOUNT**

\$150,000

**FUNDING**

2007 Special Opportunity Grant

## Grant Activities & Outcomes:

NYIC developed a partnership with 10 immigrant community groups in an intensive, multi-lingual outreach and education campaign to demystify health care and insurance, and increase immigrants' options for affordable care. The partner organizations included: Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN, Nassau County), Filipino American Human Services, Inc. (FAHSI, Queens), Haitian-Americans United for Progress (HAUP, Queens), Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York (KCS, citywide), Make the Road New York (serving Latinos in Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Queens), Latin American Integration Center (merged with Make the Road during the grant period), North Fork Spanish Apostolate (Suffolk County), Reconciliation and Culture Cooperative Network (RACCOON, serving people from the Balkans in Queens and the Bronx), Shorefront YM-YWHA of Brighton-Manhattan Beach (serving people from the former Soviet Union in Brooklyn), and South Asian Council for Social Services (SACSS, Queens). Though NYIC originally hoped to build capacity within 11 immigrant organizations and had initiated these relationships, one organization, Tamkeen, The Center for Arab American Empowerment, dropped out midway through the project because of organizational changes and thus was unable to give adequate supervision to its health advocate. Each partner organization received a small grant from NYIC for its participation in the campaign. The purpose of these small grants was to assure that each partner organization employed a part-time bicultural, bilingual health advocate to participate in NYIC's training and capacity building activities.

NYIC developed and ran a four-day intensive technical training for participating organizations in May 2008, which was followed by monthly skills building workshops. The May 2008 training sessions covered basic information ranging from financial assistance to general and advanced information about Medicaid, programs for special populations, working with the media, and how to organize and conduct advocacy. The monthly trainings provided immigrant health advocates with the most current, accurate, and practical information about how to access and pay for health care. As a result, each health advocate was able to provide direct assistance to immigrants needing health care and health insurance, and was able to conduct education and outreach about immigrants'



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rights to health care among their community members. They were also able to act as strong health care advocates in meetings with hospital administrators, legislators, and the media throughout the course of the grant period.

In addition to the resources and technical expertise available through the NYIC, immigrant health advocates were also able to benefit from legal technical assistance from two partnering pro bono legal service partners: New York Lawyers for the Public Interest and the Urban Justice Center.

NYIC administered a pre-training institute and post-training institute questionnaire for health advocates. Before the training, average scores among the 13 advocates was 80%. After four days of training, scores increased to 87%.

Based on the quarterly reports submitted by each of the health advocates, NYIC estimates that health advocates helped more than 1,000 immigrants through direct client assistance by the end of the grant period (which was its goal). During these individual counseling sessions, advocates helped immigrant community members resolve hospital and clinic billing problems and obtain discounts in accordance with New York State's hospital finance assistance law. They helped resolve enrollment problems with Medicaid, Family Health Plus, and Child Health Plus and made referrals to Medicaid offices or facilitated enrollers, provided translation and interpretation assistance in many cases where the Medicaid program or health provider did not provide language assistance, and counseled clients on their rights as immigrants to utilize and navigate the health care and insurance systems.

They also reached more than 2,800 immigrant families through community-based presentations in the languages spoken by their community members. During these presentations, health advocates concretely addressed families' unique fears and concerns about health care, and helped them understand how to access and navigate the health system. The reports, available in time for NYIC's final report to the Foundation, were from the third quarter of the grant, but the organization was on track to meet its goal of reaching more than 3,000 immigrant families.

The New York Academy of Medicine also received funding from NYSHealth to conduct a broader evaluation of NYIC's work in this area. The evaluation primarily assessed whether NYIC's project built sustainable capacity within immigrant organizations to help members access preventive and primary health care and public coverage. The results of this evaluation are available on the Foundation's website<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nyshealthfoundation.org/content/grant/detail/1141>

## The Future:

NYIC hoped to continue the training project, and expected that new techniques for improving the capacity of immigrant health advocates would be required to expand its already improved capacity and meet the challenges of today's changing political and economic environment. It secured funding for some of its core work through 2009 from the Langeloth Foundation. However, sustainability of this project depends on securing additional funding for NYIC and its community-based partners. Funding is critical to developing the capacity of a wide range of immigrant advocates to assist individuals and communities throughout the city.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

### ABOUT THE GRANTEE

The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), a nonprofit policy and advocacy umbrella organization for more than 200 member groups that work with immigrants and refugees, is a leading source of technical expertise, training, and policy analysis regarding immigrants' access to health care.

### GRANTEE CONTACT

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