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December 15, 2013

Dear Eddie,

Health Reform Update

As you know, the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) Marketplace, or Health Insurance Exchange, opened on October 1st. Significant website problems have been the focus of news reports, growing concerns, and anxiety in the community especially for those who are uninsured. Many of the problems have been in states where the federal government is operating the Exchange or Marketplace. Those states are Federally Facilitated Marketplaces and, yes, Arizona is one of those states. The federal government has been under much Congressional and public pressure to fix the problem. Solutions appear to be coming along.

According to data released by Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius on December 11th, 1.9 million customers of the healthcare.gov website have made it through the process of registering and assessing their eligibility for the premium tax credit, but have not yet selected a health plan. An additional 803,077 people have been assessed for AHCCCS (Medicaid, in other states) and KidsCare (CHIP, in other states). At the end of November, nearly 365,000 Americans actually selected health plans so they'll have coverage beginning January 1st.

The flood of interest and concern has not abated. There have been 39.1 million visitors to state and federal health exchange or marketplace websites nationally. An estimated 5.2 million calls have come in to state and federal call centers that support individuals shopping for essential health care.

So, yes, there is interest and lots of confusion. To help

folks sort out what this translates to in Arizona, and how we can help folks get on AHCCCS and the Marketplace, let's review a few key dates.

- The initial deadline for enrolling in the Marketplace/Exchange is now **December 23rd**, with actual payment of the first month's premium due on **December 31st**. These dates are for individuals who'll actually have health care coverage as of January 1st.
- Two special populations have been granted an additional month to convert from their existing coverage.

1) Children enrolled in the KidsCare II program whose households have incomes above 133% of poverty will have through **January 31st** to transition to the Marketplace/Exchange. Families will receive notices from AHCCCS informing them of this extended window of time to get enrolled in the Marketplace.

2) Individuals enrolled in the Pre-Existing Condition Insurance Plan (PCIP) will also be granted through **January 31st** to move into the Marketplace/Exchange. Notices will be sent to individuals informing them of how to pay for the one-month premium. You may recall that many of the individuals in the PCIP program were previously covered under the AHCCCS MED program (medical expenses spend down).

- AHCCCS has informed the community that if an individual applies for coverage under the Marketplace but is found to be AHCCCS eligible, there is currently no way to move the file to the AHCCCS system to finalize the eligibility determination process. In "lay terms" the federal computer doesn't talk to the state computer. It is crucial for potentially AHCCCS-eligible clients to utilize AHCCCS' Health-e-Arizona Plus (HEAplus) to apply for the program rather than relying on the Federal Marketplace to send the application materials over. Individuals using the HEAplus portal who are likely eligible for the Marketplace will be contacted by email, phone and letter to encourage them to apply for health

insurance using [health care link](#). This is another example of the computer systems not talking to each other.

Lastly, on **Friday, December 13th**, the first hearing of the court challenge on the restoration and expansion of AHCCCS was heard in Maricopa Superior Court. At issue is whether the Legislature can impose the hospital assessment (or 'tax', as described by the plaintiffs) without the request two-thirds vote by each House of the Legislature. The decision may not be made before the planned restoration and expansion on January 1st. We're all anxiously awaiting the decision and hope the bases have been covered. Stay tuned on this front!

Meet MHA-AZ Board Member



I am Karen Pitico, vice-chair of the board. I am a native of Detroit, Michigan. My bachelor's degree in social work/sociology and a master's degree in Counseling and Personnel are from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. After living in Kalamazoo, where the sun does not shine much in the winter, I moved to Phoenix. In 1976, I was an on-call psychiatry social worker at Maricopa County Hospital. When the Psychiatric

Annex opened, the department moved and I worked in a variety of positions there until 1985. During this time, I earned a Master's of Social Work at ASU. In the autumn of 1985, two fellow social workers and I took a year off work and toured Europe. One of those social workers made Athens, Greece her home. That was indeed a great adventure.

In 1986, I returned to the hospital setting in various social work positions, including out-patient social worker, a medical surgery social work supervisor, and the Director of the Social Work Department within both the hospital and ambulatory care settings. Since leaving the hospital, I worked as Behavioral Health Administrator at Maricopa Health Plan, Risk Management Coordinator, and as a Social Worker in the Correctional

Health Maricopa County Jail system. After receiving my Masters in Public Health Administration at the University of Arizona, I worked as a supervisor within the Maricopa Public Health Department.

In 1998 I spent the next 12 years with Superstition Mountain Mental Health Center in various positions including the acute care program director, Assistant Director of the Center, Vice-President of Support Services and Chief Quality Officer. In 2010, I developed my own health care consulting business working with various behavioral health organizations.

Recently my 92-year-old father passed away. I had been his caregiver for a number of years. This honored privilege took a greater meaning when he broke his hip late 2009. During my dad's most recent illness, I met another woman whose father suffered the same diagnosis as my father. In honor of our fathers, we are launching the Arizona Foundation for Swallowing Disorders, a 503(C)(3) non-profit organization. Twenty percent of the elderly who suffer from a form of dementia will acquire a swallowing disorder, the inability to remember to swallow. I am honored to serve on this Board so that my passion to advocate for the mentally ill and compromised can be fully expressed.

TWO NEW BOARD MEMBERS

MHA-AZ would like to welcome Audrey Ozols and Tammy Wray to the Board this month. They were elected in early December to join the Board.

Audrey is a Health Economics Associates with W.L. Gore, a company that manufactures medical devices. Audrey is active in the community with prior service on MHA-AZ Board of Directors. Welcome back!

Tammy is a Maricopa County Public Defender with extensive experience in serving those with mental illness. She will be a great resource for MHA-AZ as mental health issues involving the courts or correction system may arise. Welcome!

Upcoming Community Events

A free workshop for adult and youth ex-offenders who want to have their civil rights restored and have their cases set aside, will be hosted on **Wednesday, January 8th** from 9 to 11 a.m. The workshop will be at the Maricopa County Downtown Justice Court, 620 W. Jackson, 2nd floor. Registration for the workshop is suggested since there is limited seating. Contact 602-372-6803.

On **Monday, January 13th**, the 51st Arizona Legislature will convene for the second regular session. The Governor will deliver her State of the State at mid-day that day.

Mark your calendar for **Saturday, March 22nd** when the Mental Health Guild and Mental Health America of Arizona will jointly sponsor a 50's/60's bash to celebrate their respective "birthdays". Leading the effort is Cheryl Collier who can be reached at colliercl@mac.com or by phone at 602-284-0619. She's looking for sponsors for the birthday bash. Come join us!

We invite your participation and sharing of this information through resending this newsletter or encouraging your friends and colleagues to sign up to be on the monthly newsletter list. We want to be inclusive. Share the word. Get involved.

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