

# Ten Ways Probation & Parole Officers Can Help Link People to New Health Insurance Opportunities

As millions of Americans become eligible for new, affordable health insurance options in 2014, probation and parole agencies can play a vital role in making sure people learn about health coverage and get help applying. By providing information and application assistance, they can help ensure that probationers and parolees with mental illness, substance use disorders and other chronic illnesses gain access to medical and behavioral health care upon release. This can improve the continuity of care and help reduce violations and recidivism, as well as help protect public health and safety.

Many more individuals may now qualify for Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) or coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace. Many people who do not have health insurance will now be able to get it, and many may qualify for help that makes coverage easier to afford. The open enrollment period for coverage through the Marketplace runs from October 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014. Individuals may apply for Medicaid or CHIP at any time. Since some special enrollment rules apply to detainees and people recently released from prison and jail, education, outreach and application assistance are particularly important.

**Here's how probation and parole officers can contribute to the outreach and enrollment effort:**

## **Share Basic Information and Special Rules that May Apply**

- 1. Educate probation and paroles staff about new health insurance opportunities and encourage them to include this information when they talk with probationers and parolees and their families.** Knowing the basics about new health insurance opportunities and the individual's responsibility to get covered, ensures these professionals are providing the best service. Training materials and videos can be found at [Marketplace.cms.gov](http://Marketplace.cms.gov).
- 2. Help staff become familiar with eligibility and enrollment rules that apply specifically to people under supervision.** Probationers and parolees supervised in the community will be able to apply for Medicaid, CHIP or health insurance through the Marketplace. They can apply for coverage through the Marketplace during the open enrollment period or during a 60-day period from the date of their release. They can apply for Medicaid or CHIP at any time.
- 3. Provide education for probationers and parolees about their coverage options.** Highlight when, where and how to apply. Direct them to available application support services. Alert them to the range of medical and behavioral health services that will be available and how they can benefit from these services. Help them understand the new requirement to obtain health insurance coverage. Discuss the importance of health insurance for good health and for avoiding financial troubles due to unforeseen medical expenses.

- 4. Display consumer materials explaining the basics of Medicaid, CHIP and coverage through the Marketplace and how to apply.** Key locations include waiting areas, group rooms and interview rooms. Remember that probationers and parolees may have family members who need health coverage.

### **Help Probationers and Parolees Apply for Coverage**

- 5. Find out how your probation and parole system's administrative process can accommodate the health coverage application process.** Determine whether any security, administrative, or structural changes need to be made to provide access to applications and foster effective collaboration with the Marketplace and Medicaid agency. For example, are there any rules or procedures pertaining to individuals using computers or the internet in buildings or other areas where probation and parole officers meet with their clients?
- 6. Plan to provide application assistance as early as possible during supervision.** Taking steps to ensure enrollment helps to support continuity of care and avoids disrupting access to needed medication. It also improves the chances for individuals to obtain services, such as treatment for substance use and mental health disorders, directly upon release. For those who don't apply pre-release, see #2 for specific rules about applying.
- 7. Build health coverage enrollment into the intake planning process.** Alert individuals soon to be released and those on probation and parole about the range of medical and behavioral health services that are available in the community and how they can benefit from these services. Help them understand the new requirement to obtain health insurance coverage upon reentry. Discuss the importance of health insurance for good health and for avoiding financial troubles due to unforeseen medical expenses.
- 8. Provide application and enrollment assistance.** Building application assistance into probation and parole intake processes is an ideal way to start. (For parolees, the process can begin before release.) Include application activities during intake meetings and ongoing supervision. It's best to include an assessment of whether individuals may qualify for Medicaid under disability criteria, such as having a serious mental illness or chronic substance use disorder, and help steer individuals to other benefits for which they may qualify. People who want coverage need a Social Security number and may need help gathering other documentation if it cannot be obtained electronically during the application process. Consider whether any probation or parole officers could become certified application counselors.

## **9. Engage key community agencies in providing application assistance.**

Organizations that work with probationers, parolees and their families can augment the help that staff may be able to offer. A list of local community agencies that are certified application counselors that provide application assistance can be found on **Localhelp.HealthCare.gov**.

### **Promote Promising Practices**

- 10. Share ideas and successful experiences.** Document your approach to outreach and enrollment, barriers you encountered and your accomplishments. Other systems can benefit greatly from your good work and leadership.

### **For More Information**

For more information: Visit **HealthCare.gov** or **CuidadoDeSalud.gov**, or call the Health Insurance Marketplace Call Center at 1-800-318-2596. TTY users should call 1-855-889-4325. Visit **Marketplace.cms.gov** for Marketplace widgets and badges and other partner materials.