



Health Plans Ramp Up Efforts To Raise Awareness of Exchanges

By Neal Lerner

Raising awareness of the Oct. 1 launch of the insurance exchanges is a crucial step in the long effort to fully implement the Affordable Care Act. In addition to recently launched state marketing efforts, some insurers have been making the rounds at county fairs, local churches and community centers to promote the exchanges.

One of these plans is UCare. The not-for-profit, Minnesota-based insurer has at least 15 events statewide in September to discuss Minnesota's MNsure exchange.

The educational events, which take place in the 23 counties where UCare will offer products on MNsure, are designed to answer questions such as what is MNsure; what health plan is right for me; and what are the important dates and penalties associated with the reform?

“We want to help people be informed consumers of health care and coverage plans available to them so they will secure the coverage that is right for them now,”

Ghita Worcester, senior vice president of public affairs and marketing at UCare, tells HRW. “We want to reach as many eligible consumers as we can with facts about the MNsure health insurance marketplace, and how it may offer health coverage solutions to them as individuals or for their families.”

Another topic that UCare addresses is changes to the Medicaid program. Worcester notes that more than 200,000 Minnesotans are enrolled in state public programs through UCare.

“Current Medicaid members and others eligible for Medicaid need to know that

MNsure's site and personal navigators can help them determine their eligibility for state public programs or [other] programs offered on MNsure," she says. "There currently is confusion about what does and doesn't change in Minnesota's state public programs."

A few states away, Health Care Service Corp. (HCSC), which operates Blues plans in Texas, Illinois, Oklahoma and New Mexico, has been engaged in an awareness campaign known as "Be Covered" since last spring (HRW 5/29/13, p. 4).

"We began with a single community partner and today count more than 150," David Sandor, vice president of public affairs and corporate communications at HCSC, tells HRW.

Over the summer, each organization has adapted the Be Covered campaign in ways that best reach its membership, he explains.

"For example, at Windsor Village United Methodist Church in Houston, the pastor invited a Be Covered Texas volunteer to speak to the congregation at all three Sunday services; that's more than 7,500 people," Sandor says. "We also continue to share information through our text campaign, social media and the Be Covered website."

HCSC's challenges at first centered on simply letting people know there was a new law, he says.

"Over time, as we engaged people, awareness improved and people began to ask questions," Sandor recalls. "With each question, we evolved our content to help address the interests and concerns that were most common. There is a lot of information, and we learned quickly that you need to focus on the basics and ensure that the information you share reflects the items people care most about."

Sandor says the yardstick for success is the degree to which community organizations of all sizes embrace the educational mission of Be Covered and carry

it on independently. “At this point, success can best be measured by the estimated 2 million people who have received basic information [from HCSC] about the Affordable Care Act,” he says. “The real test will come between October and March, when millions of people have the opportunity to enroll.”

Contact Sandor at david_sandor@hcsc.net and Worcester via Deanne Probst at dprobst@ucare.org.