



## Engaging Veterans in Medicaid Expansion Campaigns

Advocates have a unique opportunity to engage veterans in Medicaid expansion campaigns. Currently, one in ten veterans is uninsured. Forty percent of them – plus hundreds of thousands of their spouses – could qualify for Medicaid if their state takes up the option to draw down federal Medicaid funds under the Affordable Care Act (ACA).<sup>1</sup> This memo provides tips and tools for consumer health advocates interested in engaging the veteran community in Medicaid expansion campaigns.

### How will veterans and their families benefit from the Medicaid expansion?

- **Not all veterans are able to access Veterans Administration (VA) services.** While the VA health delivery system provides low-cost care to veterans, many veterans do not qualify or are not able to use VA services for a number of reasons. For example, eligibility is based on a variety of factors such as service-related disabilities and income level. In addition, many veterans may not live near VA facilities or lack confidence that they qualify for the care they need. Also, veterans' families do not qualify for services through the VA.
- **One in ten nonelderly veterans reports neither having health insurance coverage nor using the VA system,** totaling 1.3 million uninsured veterans nationwide. Another 645,000 of veterans' spouses are uninsured.<sup>2</sup>
- **Forty percent of all uninsured veterans would gain coverage under the ACA's Medicaid expansion,** and a quarter of uninsured veterans' spouses would gain coverage as well.<sup>3</sup> Being covered by Medicaid would not preclude them from using the VA system if they qualify, and would offer them access to greater health care choices at a lower cost.

### Advocates can engage the veterans' community in their Medicaid expansion campaigns

**Veterans are compelling spokespeople for Medicaid expansion because their service is closely tied to society's core values.** The idea that veterans should be taken care of when they come home from service and that our country owes a responsibility to them for their sacrifice is deeply embedded in our culture and attitudes. Making the connection between that value (veterans shouldn't be uninsured) and action (expanding Medicaid) creates a powerful narrative for your campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> Haley, J and Kenney, G. "Uninsured Veterans and Family Members: State and National Estimates of Expanded Medicaid Eligibility Under the ACA," Urban Institute (2013)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

For this reason (and others) veterans can be compelling spokespeople and bring a unique story to the table. Much as with other spokespeople in a campaign, veterans can testify at hearings, tell their story to the press, and speak at events.

Before approaching veterans, it's important to familiarize yourself with the values, structure, policies, and expectations of the military to ensure you can approach them in a culturally-competent manner. Here are some tips and best practices for engaging the veteran community on this issue:

- **Keep your message politically neutral, and focused on the concrete benefits of the expansion to veterans and their families.** During active duty, service members are prohibited from being involved in politics. As a result, many veterans avoid overtly political activity. When engaging veterans on this issue, stay politically neutral and focus on how veterans and their spouses will benefit from Medicaid.
- **Find a trusted community contact to help you engage the larger veteran community.** Veterans themselves are the best messengers to other veterans, since they already have one another's trust. A good strategy is to find one veteran who is interested and engaged in the campaign, who can educate the broader veteran community about how they stand to benefit from the Medicaid expansion. You might start by trying to engage veterans who are public figures, such as friendly state legislators. These veterans are already comfortable taking a stance on political issues, and they can then serve as a liaison to the broader veteran community.
- **Places to engage veterans:**
  - Many college campuses have veterans offices
  - County Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) – VSOs are tasked with understanding laws, and how they affect veterans and their families.
  - Your local community health centers' consumer advisory boards may have veterans
  - Local Veterans of Foreign Wars community centers

#### **Further resources:**

To find out how many uninsured veterans and veterans' spouses could gain coverage in your state, read The Urban Institute's analysis:

[http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue\\_briefs/2013/rwjf405143](http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2013/rwjf405143)

To locate a Veterans Affairs Office by state, visit:

<http://www.va.gov/statedva.htm>

To find a Veterans Service Officer, visit National Association of County Veterans Service Officers:

<http://nacvso.org/find-a-service-officer/>