



How Local Officials Can Help Their Community Get Health Coverage in the Health Insurance Marketplace

From November 2014 through February 2015, hundreds of mayors, county officials, city council members, and other local officials across the country helped connect residents in their communities to quality, affordable health coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace.

As Houston Mayor Annise Parker and Tampa Mayor Bob Buckhorn explained in a [February 2014 Op-Ed](#) about cities' stake in getting residents covered:

“Local communities, not Washington and not our state capitals, are where the impact of big decisions about health care are keenly felt. High concentrations of people with no health coverage threaten the health systems everyone in a city depends on. Having so many uninsured people in one place means more strain on health care providers. On the other hand, getting more people covered is a smart public health strategy.”

<http://www.tampabay.com/opinion/columns/column-building-stronger-cities-through-better-health-coverage/2164474>

The next open enrollment period for health insurance will run from **November 1, 2015 through January 31, 2016**. There are several ways that local officials can ensure that residents in their community get the information and assistance to enroll. The most effective practices for local elected officials include:

- ✓ Make your office an information center for enrollment information – referring residents to appropriate local help locations
- ✓ Leverage local resources, like city/county facilities, to provide enrollment opportunities
- ✓ Partner with community organizations on a local enrollment coalition
- ✓ Generate media coverage, via press conferences, local access TV/radio, or PSAs to raise awareness and promote enrollment sites
- ✓ Host community enrollment events

And even prior to open enrollment, many of these activities will also be effective to reach out to people who qualify for a special enrollment period or those who qualify for CHIP or Medicaid which have year round enrollments. It is important to remember that even though low-income individuals can enroll in Medicaid anytime during the year, the open enrollment period is a good opportunity to reach out to individuals who might be eligible but unenrolled.

This packet includes information and best practices from local officials during the first enrollment period to help you accomplish these goals. We encourage you to share your ideas and questions through the ten [HHS Regional Offices](#). Contact information for the Regional Offices can also be found at the end of this packet.



How Local Officials Can Use Existing City/County Resources to Help Enroll Residents in Health Coverage

There are a number of ways that local officials can use existing city and county resources to help enroll residents in quality, affordable health coverage. Below are some of the methods and specific examples of activities that elected officials utilized during the first open enrollment period in 2013-14.

- Open city/county facilities up for enrollment activities:** Set regular office hours for enrollment at recreation centers, libraries, workforce development sites and other city/county offices. Work with your HHS Regional Office to identify trained assisters who can staff these sites, or train city/county personnel.
 - The City of St. Louis held enrollment sessions at public libraries every week throughout the enrollment period.
 - The City of Jacksonville held weekend enrollment sessions at city sports complexes to help residents sign up for coverage.

- Make health coverage information available at all city/county facilities** and train consumer-facing city/county employees to answer basic questions and provide referrals to assisters. Coordinate with local partners on providing interest cards that consumers can fill out for follow-up information.
 - The City of Philadelphia partnered with Enroll America to train city employees about the marketplace and ask all residents coming to city offices whether they had health coverage and if they needed assistance enrolling.

- Apply to become a Certified Application Counselor (CAC) designated organization** and have staff trained to become CACs to provide assistance in city/county facilities. You can apply to be a CAC organization at <https://marketplace.cms.gov/technical-assistance-resources/assister-programs/cac.html>
 - Mayor Wilda Diaz of Perth Amboy, NJ, requested an ACA educational session from HHS staff to provide an overview of the ACA and the marketplace, prior to the city becoming a Certified Application Counselor organization.

- Use city/county call centers and action lines** to refer consumers to enrollment assistance locations.
 - In the City of Austin, the healthcare district in Travis County used paid media to direct consumers to the local 211 call center, which in turn identified the closest location where consumers can get assistance to enroll.

- Include informational inserts in regular mailings** to residents
 - The City of Houston included a one-page insert about the Health Insurance Marketplace in their monthly water bill mailing to all city residents.

- Host a press conference to kick off open enrollment and before large enrollment events** to let residents know about upcoming enrollment opportunities and generate earned media. In addition, include information on the Marketplace at other events to continue to push the message.
 - Dayton, OH Mayor Nan Whaley held a press conference to highlight the importance of ACA enrollment and alert residents to assistance available in the community.

- Add enrollment information, location, and times to public calendars and public signage.** Include on any city/county websites information about where to find local assistance as well as the national 1-800 number.
 - Milwaukee County added information on the website and 1-800 number to electronic signage on county buses and electronic signs at the county zoo to inform residents about where to sign up and get assistance.

- Work with the local school district and PTA** to include information for parents through school newsletters, back-to-school events, open houses and take home pamphlets.
 - The City of Nashville partnered with local schools to host a health coverage open house for parents at local schools.
 - The Los Angeles Unified School District provided a backpack stuffer for all students to take home asking “Am I Covered?” and provide information for parents on where to get assistance enrolling.

- Record a PSA encouraging residents to enroll** in the Marketplace and work with local television and radio stations to air the announcements.
 - Multnomah County, OR Commissioner Loretta Smith recorded a radio spot that aired on radio stations throughout the county.
 - San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro recorded a video on why residents should enroll.

- Use emails, newsletters, and telephone networks** to reach consumers with enrollment information.
 - Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed recorded and sent a targeted automated call to residents letting them know about the opportunity to enroll in health coverage.

- Serve as “door openers” or conveners** for city, county, or regional roundtables targeting special populations, chambers of commerce, school boards, and hard-to-reach entities
 - Orlando Mayor Pro Tem Samuel Ings hosted a Faith Leaders breakfast with over 60 local interdenominational leaders who each provided a written commitment for specific actions (hosting enrollment events; provide information in church bulletins, etc.) to support local enrollment efforts.



How Local Officials Can Work with a Community Coalition to Enroll Residents in Health Coverage

One of the most important roles that local officials played during the past Open Enrollment periods was to convene and support local coalitions of business leaders, non-profit organizations, and health care providers to coordinate on outreach and enrollment strategies. It is critical to maintain and strengthen these coalitions and continue the outreach work in the community as we move into the next Open Enrollment.

Keys to a successful enrollment coalition:

- **Local leadership** – As a leader within your community, your participation can help elevate the work of the coalition. Designate a staff member to be the primary point of contact for the coalition, and utilize your communications staff and infrastructure to support press efforts.
- **Broad representation** – The most effective coalitions have representatives from all the relevant partners; a suggested list of organizations is below. Think beyond the typical healthcare stakeholders!
- **Communication** – Many coalitions benefited from regular communications leading up to and during enrollment. Weekly meetings or calls and portals for group collaboration (shared calendars, access to shared data, regular reports) helped regions divide responsibilities and reduce duplicative efforts.

Some organizations and partners that you may want to consider including:

- Hospitals
- Chamber of Commerce
- Insurance brokers
- Grassroots organizations like Enroll America, Organizing for Action, Planned Parenthood
- Labor unions
- Faith leaders and interfaith coalitions
- Community health centers
- Healthcare providers or organizations, such as doctors, nurses, or social workers
- Colleges and universities including community colleges and technical colleges
- Fraternities and sororities
- Representation from key populations specific to the local community
- Public school district representatives
- Libraries
- [HHS Regional Office](#)

Examples:

In 2013, King County Executive Dow Constantine organized a “[Leadership Circle](#)” from business, labor, education, healthcare and community organizations to lead outreach in their sectors, advise him on the enrollment initiative, and help shape outreach strategies. He appointed three co-chairs from the health, business, and non-profit sectors and the group began planning communications and outreach eight months before enrollment began.

In 2013, the City of Houston set up the Gulf Coast Collaborative, modeled on an emergency management response system with community-based partners to coordinate enrollment initiatives. The City Department of Health and Human Services coordinated across the diverse group of partners to share information and maximize efforts on training, communications, data, and logistics.



How Local Officials Can Use Enrollment Events to Help Enroll Residents in Health Coverage

While many individuals will enroll online at healthcare.gov or through the call center at 1-800-318-2596, many residents will want in-person assistance to help explain their coverage options and walk through the enrollment process. One way to help connect residents to this assistance is by hosting enrollment events. Below are some tips on how to host a successful enrollment event.

Creating an enrollment event

- Decide what type of enrollment activity you will host. You can host information-only sessions, town halls where residents can ask questions of experts, open houses where residents can walk in to meet with an assister, or an event where residents register for an appointment in advance.
- It can be helpful to integrate Marketplace information and enrollment into appropriate existing community events, to take advantage of a built-in audience and shared logistical support.
- Planning enrollment events can take time – most have found that planning four weeks in advance of the event provides adequate time to coordinate logistics, volunteers and promotion.

Location and timing

- The ideal location is one that is easy to access, has ample parking, and is recognizable to the community. Libraries, recreation centers, sports complexes and city or county hall can be ideal locations to host events. Many hospitals also have space available for use.
- Ensure that there are adequate safeguards (physical and electronic) in place to protect consumers' information, and that there is strong internet connection at the site. Have a backup internet connection plan such as air cards.
- Events that reach the most residents are held either in the evening or on weekends.
- The best venues have multiple spaces to meet the different needs of consumers, such as a room for a video or PowerPoint presentation on the marketplace while consumers wait, computer banks for group account creation, and a one-on-one room for enrollment appointments.

Materials & Assisters

- It is helpful to provide attendees with an enrollment checklist ([available online](#)) in advance of the event so they can come prepared with the necessary information and documentation.
- You will need computers with Internet access for residents to enroll and a way for consumers to print the pertinent information from their enrollment when completed.
- Identify local assisters at <https://localhelp.healthcare.gov/> or work with your [HHS regional office](#) to confirm CAC and Navigator support for your event

Promoting the event

- Partner with local media outlets such as local television or radio stations to help spread the word and increase attendance. Use your social media channels to promote the event.
- Identify event spokespeople who speak the language of the intended audience for your enrollment event.
- Enlist known local leaders or celebrities to attend or promote the event.
- Encourage attendees to create an email address and an online account at HealthCare.Gov before the event to reduce waiting time on site.



HHS Regional Directors Contact Information

<http://www.hhs.gov/about/agencies/regional-offices/index.html>

Region 1 – Boston

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