

Retention Initiative: Achieving Stability in Medicaid and SCHIP Coverage

*Leadership provided by the Southern Institute on Children and Families
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Electronic Referral System Between Medicaid and SCHIP

Implementing an electronic referral system improves the transition between Medicaid and SCHIP during the renewal processes, thus keeping children from unnecessarily losing coverage.

Pennsylvania's Electronic Referral: Healthcare Handshake

The Healthcare Handshake is a collaborative effort between the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (Medicaid agency) and the Pennsylvania Insurance Department (SCHIP agency) to improve customer service and promote access to health care. The Healthcare Handshake automates the exchange of information between the two departments to make the referral process more efficient and accurate.

The Healthcare Handshake uses Pennsylvania's online application system, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Access to Social Services (COMPASS), to exchange information between the two departments. The Pennsylvania Insurance Department sends information to the Department of Public Welfare if an individual's income is too low to qualify for SCHIP. The Department of Public Welfare sends information to the Pennsylvania Insurance Department if a household or an individual's income or resources are too high or if an individual, for certain non-financial reasons, is ineligible for Medicaid.

Pennsylvania began piloting this collaborative in five of its 67 counties in March 2008. The participating Department of Public Welfare County Assistance Offices are in Lancaster, Schuylkill, Northumberland, Montour and Columbia counties and the participating insurance contractors are Capital Blue Cross, Unison, Aetna and Highmark. On July 14, 2008 the pilot was extended to four additional counties, Bucks, Butler, Luzerne and Lawrence and all insurance contractors who participate in SCHIP. The program is tentatively scheduled for statewide implementation in late September or early October 2008.

IMPACT MEASURES

Among the five pilot sites, the Department of Public Welfare has made 4,649 referrals as of July 2, 2008 and the Pennsylvania Insurance Department has made 729 referrals as of June 30, 2008.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Funds, staff expertise and time and system technology are the primary resources. Funding is required to support system changes, testing and monitoring. Staff expertise and time from Medicaid and SCHIP departments including administration, policy, operations, program support, information technology and county eligibility determination offices within the pilot areas.

KEY PARTNERS

The Department of Public Welfare (DPW) and the Pennsylvania Insurance Department (PID) head up the Healthcare Handshake. The policy units within DPW and PID develop requirements for the program and monitor the system with test cases. The Bureau of Program Support, Office of Administration – Information Technology, PID Information Technology and Deloitte consultant make system changes and monitor the process with test cases. System changes are made based on the directives from DPW Bureau of Policy and Bureau of Operations, as well as from PID Operations and Policy. The County Assistance Offices and insurance contractors monitor the referrals and report problems.

LESSONS LEARNED

There has been very positive feedback from the County Assistance Offices and Insurance Department Contractors. Based on their feedback and system testing, issues have been identified and resolved, or will be resolved prior to statewide rollout. One example of a resolved issue involved cases in which Food Stamps were authorized, but Medical Assistance was rejected. The referral software was not identifying the referral correctly. A system change was made, scenarios were tested and the problem was resolved.

Overall, the process has become much smoother, faster and efficient, making it helpful to the contractors, County Assistance Offices, other Pennsylvania agencies (such as Children and Youth), community (including applicants and recipients) and community partners (such as churches and other advocates).

CONTACT INFORMATION

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The goal for the Retention Initiative is to increase the rate of retention of eligible children and adults in Medicaid and SCHIP. The Southern Institute is assisting state teams from Alabama, Florida, Iowa, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Texas and Washington through specialized consultation and technical assistance designed to help the state teams: (a) adopt simplified eligibility policies and processes focused on retaining eligible children and adults, and (b) ensure accuracy of the eligibility determination processes at renewal to decrease inappropriate Medicaid and SCHIP closures.

For additional information about the Retention Initiative please contact Judi Cramer at jcramer@thesoutherninstitute.org.