

Educating Californians about the Affordable Care Act

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The California Endowment launched a consumer education effort aimed at explaining the contents of the Affordable Care Act for one simple reason: our organization's mission is "to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities, and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians." In spite of the law's contentious passage, we recognized that the new health care law will help the people of California, but only if they understand their benefits.

Implementation of the law is an important dynamic in our Building Healthy Communities work, which came about after concluding that communities are where healthy living actually begins. Fourteen communities in some of the most underserved parts of California are taking a hard look at the systems and structures within their communities to decide what they think is getting in the way of their health, and then *doing* something to change those obstacles. They are "building healthy communities."

One of the goals of our effort is that every child in the Building Healthy Communities locations has health coverage and improved access to health care that supports healthy behaviors. Anthony Iton, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., senior vice president in charge of this program, says, "With full implementation of the Affordable Care Act, (this goal) is achieved; without it, it's difficult to see how this can happen."

CHOOSING TO MOVE FORWARD

Our studies showed that almost all Californians, even those who would benefit most from the law, knew very little about specific provisions of the law. In August, we launched a \$5-million effort to educate Californians about the new law and

its benefits. The effort included:

- coordinated communications with a broad coalition of organizations with similar missions;
- the creation of several television and radio commercials, some in Spanish, and multimillion dollar media buys to air them;
- local events in as many of the Building Healthy Communities sites as possible;
- an ethnic media education effort that included editorial board briefings with knowledgeable doctors, health officials, small business leaders, and families already positively affected by the law, as well as advertorials with a section detailing where people could get their questions answered by experts;
- an education effort aimed at small businesses; and
- a social media outreach component for the 26 and under youth who can now stay on their parents' health insurance.

We learned that when we take the time to clearly communicate with grantees, stakeholders, and communities, they in turn are more energized, focused, and engaged.

Two distinct components characterized the first phase of this effort, which was designed, executed, and completed in three months.

- *Creating and executing the strategy:* We chose the path that produces the greatest return on investment.
- *Evaluating the results:* We designed metrics to test the effort's effectiveness and learn lessons for future phases of the initiative.

This is not the first time The California Endowment has used

some or all of these tools to fulfill our mission. Our experience has taught us that it is important to fully understand our objectives and audience, and to develop and execute a focused strategy. Furthermore, we learned that when we take the time to clearly communicate with grantees, stakeholders, and communities, they in turn are more energized, focused, and engaged.

CRAFTING AND EXECUTING THE STRATEGY

We commissioned several polls and focus groups to determine the most effective initial strategy and messages. We found that across the state, knowledge of specific provisions of the law was extremely low AND when people learned more about the law, they liked it more.

After careful deliberation, we decided the first phase of the education effort should be largely focused on paid media outreach to Latino Californians, with more targeted efforts focused on outreach to business opinion leaders and young adults on-line.

► **Targeted Paid Media:** Latinos make up more than 37 percent of the current California population and approximately 70 percent of our Building Healthy Communities site residents. According to our survey research, more than three-quarters of Latino adults (76 percent) said they had not heard anything about the health care reform law or did not have enough information about it. Moreover, Spanish-language media offer an effective vehicle to target an education message to this important demographic. For these reasons, we decided to focus on Latinos in the first phase of our media effort.

We recruited popular Spanish-media medical expert Dr. Isabel Gomez-Bassols to record two educational television advertisements, highlighting provisions of the law that our survey research indicated were particularly important to the Latino audience. Similar ads were created for radio. We also provided experts on the Affordable Care Act to Spanish language news programs.

► **Business Community Outreach:** We found that many business leaders were unaware of the provisions of the new health care law that are designed to help the business community. The California Endowment team worked with business leaders supportive of the law to help educate their colleagues about the new law's impact on small and large businesses and the people they employ. This included an effort to encourage various business leaders to write op-eds and to help educate reporters.

► **Targeted Social Media Effort:** Because many of the provisions that took effect September 23 of this year affected citizens below the age of 26, we launched a targeted on-line effort focused on this demographic. We created the Web site www.GetCoveredCA.org, a Facebook page, YouTube videos, on-line banner ads, search word buys, "invite your friend" campaigns, and used Twitter to reach

out directly to those under 26 to engage them in a conversation about their new health care coverage options.

RESULTS

While this was not the first time The California Endowment has used paid advertising, we did intend to learn how effective its use was in educating the public about the Affordable Care Act. To achieve this, we commissioned two third-party polling firms to create metrics for the paid media effort's effectiveness and to compare data before and after the Latino-focused ads ran.

The results were very positive:

- **55 percent of Latinos** who regularly watch Spanish-language television **said they saw the advertisement** after only three weeks of airing.
- **82 percent of people** who have seen the television advertisement said they **had a positive impression of the spot**.
- Overall, **70 percent of Spanish-language media users now say they have a positive impression of the health care law, and 35 percent "very positive"** – figures that are up from 52 percent and 11 percent respectively in the baseline survey.

The metrics for the business and young adult outreach initiatives were also encouraging.

For the business outreach effort, the earned media team placed approximately 100 articles, op-eds, and/or advertisements in print and broadcast outlets. Additionally, over 3,000 reporters or producers who focus on business, health, or politics were provided background material about the health care bill's impact on the business community.

On the young adult on-line front, GetCoveredCA.org has received over 31,000 unique visitors, the [GetCoveredCA](https://www.facebook.com/GetCoveredCA) Facebook page has over 12,500 supporters, and the effort's ads on Google and YouTube have generated over 15 million impressions.

MOVING FORWARD

Success or failure of the federal health care law will have a profound impact on the health status of all Californians, of all Americans. This education effort was predicated on the assumption that whatever people thought about the bill before it became law, it is now the current law of the land and everyone has an interest in knowing about the many benefits that can keep them healthier.

VIEWS FROM THE FIELD is offered by GIH as a forum for health grantmakers to share insights and experiences. If you are interested in participating, please contact Faith Mitchell at 202.452.8331 or fmitchell@gih.org.