HIV Health Care Access Working Group

Ryan White Working Group

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Mary Wakefield, Ph.D., R.N. RADM Deborah Parham Hopson, PhD, RN, FAAN
Administrator Associate Administrator for HIV/AIDS
Health Resources and Services Administration Health Resources and Services Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Rockville, MD Rockville, MD

Dear Drs. Wakefield and Hopson:

We are writing on behalf of the HIV Health Care Access Working Group (HHCAWG) and the Ryan White Working Group (RWWG) regarding the intersection of Affordable Care Act (ACA) implementation and the Ryan White Program. In particular, we are reiterating requests for increased information on the ACA and technical assistance for Ryan White-funded programs and providers.

As you know, the ACA along with the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) provides a historic opportunity to dramatically improve access to HIV care and treatment and to address long-standing HIV-related disparities in the U.S. The success of the ACA in meeting the goals of the NHAS will depend on the ability to leverage the expertise and experience of the state-of-the-art HIV care programs and providers developed by the Ryan White Program.

As we discussed at our meeting last December, there is an urgent need to help Ryan White-funded grantees engage in the health care delivery changes underway and to prepare for the new health care financing environment in 2014. In December, a grantee communications strategy was unveiled that represented an important step toward developing a plan to address the needs of Ryan White grantees as they prepare to integrate into the new health care system created by the ACA’s coverage expansion.

We understand that the communications plan has been altered and that HRSA is now soliciting comments for a potential reauthorization through a Federal Register notice. While we agree that engaging stakeholders in identifying issues with the Ryan White Program is important, we are most concerned that grantees are not being prepared for how to move forward under the ACA and the Medicaid expansion in particular. The communications plan called for grantee forums and dialogues on the ACA, and we are concerned that part of the plan has not occurred and no additional notice or information has been provided. Meanwhile, states are moving forward on key implementation decisions, such as developing insurance exchange rules and defining their essential health benefits standards.

We appreciate that HRSA is actively engaged in ACA implementation and that HAB is undergoing an organizational restructuring and expansion. However, one of the important lessons learned from states...
that have expanded Medicaid early, such as California, included the need to maintain open and ongoing communication between the various stakeholder groups to make the transition to new health care coverage a success for low income people with HIV/AIDS.

Members of the HHCAWG and RWWG welcome the opportunity to maintain a regular dialogue with HRSA and HAB and to partner on effective ACA implementation. Doing so is critical to realize the full potential of the ACA for people with HIV/AIDS.

To that end, HHCAWG and RWWG would like to schedule a meeting with you as soon as possible to understand what is happening and how we can move forward to ensure that grantees and sub-grantees are fully prepared for this transition. Specific recommendations that we would like to discuss include the creation of an HIV/AIDS Bureau (HAB) health care reform stakeholder advisory group (or monthly or bi-monthly meetings with the partners group to take on this function) and designation of a HAB staff contact person to respond to inquiries and requests as states move forward with health care reform implementation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robert Greenwald, HIV Health Care Access Working Group Co-Chair
Ann Lefert, Ryan White Working Group Co-Chair
William McColl, Ryan White Working Group Co-Chair
Andrea Weddle, HIV Health Care Access Working Group Co-Chair

On Behalf of the Following Organizations:

AIDS Alliance for Children, Youth & Families
The AIDS Institute
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
AIDS United
American Academy of HIV Medicine
Communities Advocating Emergency AIDS Relief (CAEAR)
HIV Medicine Association
National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors
National Association of People with AIDS
National Minority AIDS Council
Project Inform
Ryan White Medical Providers Coalition
San Francisco AIDS Foundation
Treatment Access Expansion Project
VillageCare