

News Release



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California Workforce Primed to Help Families Seeking Health Coverage

Study Shows “Certified Application Assistants” Critical to Healthcare System & Community

Los Angeles, CA—More than 20,000 individuals in California are trained as “Certified Application Assistants” to help families enroll in and maintain their public healthcare coverage. Community Health Councils’ study *Bridging the Health Divide: California’s Certified Application Assistants* shows that CAAs are educated and informed, experienced, mirror the communities they serve, and are well positioned to bridge the divide between health insurance and uninsured families.

“While the profession has grown and evolved through the years, very little is known about this dynamic workforce,” says Lark Galloway-Gilliam, executive director of Community Health Councils, a health advocacy organization located in Los Angeles, and lead author of the report with Mark Paredes, CHC policy analyst. In anticipation of healthcare reform, Community Health Councils conducted a survey of 164 Certified Application Assistants in Los Angeles County to determine their potential to help Californians benefit from new opportunities for health coverage.

Although a relatively small workforce, CAAs have significantly decreased the uninsured population through their efforts. LA County’s *Metro* Service Planning Area (encompassing Boyle Heights, Central LA, Hollywood, Northeast LA, West Hollywood, West Wilshire LA, and Wilshire), with a high concentration of CAAs, saw its number of uninsured children drop from 78,000 in 2001 to 26,000 by 2005. CAAs provide case management services ranging from enrollment verification to maintaining client contact and troubleshooting program issues to ensure effective utilization of coverage. “Our study indicated that forty-one percent of Certified Application Assistants hold associates or bachelors degrees, seventy-two percent have completed three or more training courses beyond the state exam requirements, and forty-six percent have more than five years experience in this field,” says Mark Paredes.

CAAs have won the trust of their communities and are viewed as valuable resources with extensive knowledge of public coverage programs, understanding of community resources, and direct connections with hard-to-reach populations. The ethnicity of the CAA workforce is predominately

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Latino (82%), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (8%). Sixty-three percent of LA County's uninsured but eligible children are Latino and 8% are Asian/Pacific Islander. The largest percentage of CAAs (38%) fall in the 25-35 year age group and women made up 88% of the workforce in our survey. Eighty percent speak Spanish, 10% speak another non-English language, and 92% are multilingual.

CAAs practice throughout Los Angeles, but are concentrated in the areas with the highest rates of uninsured eligible for public coverage programs. CAAs are employed by clinics and providers (39%), community-based organizations (29%) and school-based entities (7%).

The CAA field is a growing occupation that has the potential to assist with the rollout of health reform as well as educate families about health risks such as H1N1. As healthcare policies and regulations change, CAAs will play a larger role in conducting outreach to the community, helping families enroll in health programs, and providing health education.

Certified Application Assistors have proved effective in helping families with their healthcare coverage needs. CAAs are the vehicle for on-the-ground marketing to assist the state in reducing the number of uninsured residents in Los Angeles. "With health reform poised to change the healthcare landscape, California's CAA infrastructure will provide an invaluable tool in helping individuals and families successfully navigate and utilize the new program just as they did when the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) was first introduced in 1997," suggests Mark Parades. "Outreach workers and CAAs will once again provide the bridge between families and health coverage."

Bridging the Health Divide: California's Certified Application Assistants is available on the Community Health Councils website at www.chc-inc.org/policy-briefs. It is the first in a series of policy briefs that focus outreach and enrollment efforts for children and families eligible for but not enrolled in public health coverage. Funding for the survey was provided by The California Endowment.

Community Health Councils is a non-profit, community-based health promotion, advocacy and policy organization. Established in 1992, CHC's mission is to improve health and increase access to quality healthcare for uninsured, economically-disadvantaged, and underserved populations.