



The Health Consumer Alliance

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MEDIA CONTACT:
Laurence M. Lavin, Director Jeff Okey
National Health Law Program The California Endowment
(310) 663-1905 (818) 932-3351

HEALTH CONSUMER ALLIANCE HELPS THOUSANDS OF UNINSURED CALIFORNIANS ACCESS AND RETAIN HEALTH COVERAGE

Program Receives \$7 Million in Funding Following Demonstrated Success

SACRAMENTO – The Health Consumer Alliance (HCA), a nonprofit partnership of Health Consumer Centers that provide one-on-one legal assistance to low-income individuals through representation, education and advocacy has proven to be a successful, model program in reaching California’s underserved communities.

Today, HCA announced the results of an independent evaluation by researchers at University of Southern California’s (USC) Division of Community Health, which found that HCA centers have helped more than 45,000 California consumers with their problems with enrollment, retention and access to medical services, particularly through Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. The study also found that HCA centers have been effective advocates for local and statewide improvements to California’s public health systems.

Also today, The California Endowment, a private, statewide health foundation, awarded HCA a three-year, \$7.2 million grant for the program’s continuation in 11 counties throughout the state, adding to the \$14 million in grants already provided by The Endowment over the past five years.

“We are grateful that we will be able to continue helping consumers to get the health care they need.” said Manjusha P. Kulkarni, director of the Health Consumer Alliance.

“HCA’s broad outreach to underserved communities and work to reduce existing barriers will help the 1.2 million Californians who are eligible for public health insurance programs access our health system,” said Robert K. Ross, M.D., President and CEO of The Endowment. “HCA’s proven to be a successful program that should be replicated throughout the state to help the more than 6 million uninsured Californians.”

HCA provides linguistically appropriate and culturally sensitive, individualized legal counseling services to educate consumers about their health care rights; assists those who don’t qualify for public health insurance programs access medical services; resolves billing disputes; and helps low-income seniors get prescription drugs, among many other services.

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According to USC's evaluation, the HCA filed civil rights complaints on behalf of limited-English proficient Medi-Cal mental health consumers trying to access linguistically appropriate services, which resulted in settlement agreements for those patients so they were able to access critical mental health services, and prompted the Office of Civil Rights to monitor counties' compliance to providers' language access requirements.

"HCA's Health Consumer Centers help simplify enrollment procedures and identify systemic problems, which, when resolved, benefit all health care consumers," said California State Senator Deborah Ortiz.

"The Health Consumer Centers' services to consumers are even more vital now when the economy and state budget crisis are likely to make it more difficult to obtain necessary health care," stated California State Senator and Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee Deirdre (Dede) Alpert.

HCA's Health Consumer Centers are located in Sacramento, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, Fresno and Orange, serving residents in 10 counties including Yolo, Placer and El Dorado. With the additional grant funding, services will be available to Alameda County residents in the coming months. HCA's Health Consumer Centers also conduct culturally specific outreach and education to health consumers, community-based organizations and insurance providers. All educational and outreach materials are available in multiple languages, including Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, Vietnamese and Russian.

The HCA is comprised of Health Consumer Centers in seven local, legal service programs serving ten California counties. The National Health Law Program contributes health law expertise and policy advocacy at the state and national level and the Western Center on Law and Poverty provides legislative and administrative advocacy at the state level. For more information, visit HCA's Web site at www.healthconsumer.org.

The California Endowment was established in 1996 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. The Endowment has regional offices in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, Fresno and San Diego with program staff working throughout the state. The Endowment makes grants to organizations and institutions that directly benefit the health and well-being of the people of California. For more information, visit their Web site at www.calendow.org.

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Editor's Note: A copy of USC's Evaluation Report can be found on HCA's Web site at www.healthconsumer.org or by calling the National Health Law Program at (310) 204-6010.