

INSURE MORE PEOPLE

Affordable Care Act Holds Great Promise for Improving Healthcare Services

by Jill Hanken, Virginia Poverty Law Center

Since signed into law in March 2010, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), has been the subject of both wild celebration and vigorous condemnation.

The ACA addresses nearly all the problems associated with the high cost of healthcare. The primary components of the ACA include private insurance reform, an expansion of Medicaid and a Health Benefit Exchange – a new insurance marketplace that will offer affordable insurance options and stimulate competition among insurance companies.

Major components in the healthcare law which are in effect today include the following:

- Young adults are able to stay on their parents' health insurance plans until they reach age 26. Previously, this population often remained uninsured for months or years after losing coverage from their parent's plans.
- Insurance companies can no longer deny coverage to children with pre-existing health conditions. (In 2014, pre-existing condition restrictions will also be prohibited for adults.)
- The Medicare Part D doughnut hole is being phased out and will be totally eliminated by 2020.
- Small businesses with fewer than 25 employees who earn average annual wages less than \$50,000 can receive a tax credit for the cost of employee health insurance.
- Cost sharing for preventive health services, such as mammography, colonoscopies and prostate cancer screenings, has been eliminated.

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- A Pre-existing Condition Insurance Plan (PCIP) is now available to people with pre-existing conditions. To qualify they must be uninsured for six months. The major ACA components that become operational in 2014 include:
- The Health Benefits Exchanges will provide a one-stop shop to compare, select and purchase private health insurance. The Exchange will calculate and help administer federal tax credit subsidies designed to make health insurance affordable. It will also determine eligibility and facilitate enrollment for Medicaid and children's health insurance programs.
- The Medicaid expansion will cover individuals under age 65 who have income under 133% of the federal poverty line (\$14,857 / year for an individual; \$30,657/ year for a family of 4).
- The "minimum essential coverage provision," also known as the "individual mandate," will require most people and employers to have/provide health insurance or pay a tax penalty.



Jill Hanken

With health insurance costs spiraling higher each year, the ranks of the insured growing and the U.S. per capita cost for healthcare getting higher than all other industrialized nations, the need for the key provisions of ACA is compelling.

**Adapted from a longer article by the author available at: <http://www.coopercenter.org/publications/VANs1tr0518>*

Request for Proposals Announcement

New location

Thursday, May 3, 2012 9:00 a.m.

Suffolk Center for Cultural Arts New location

110 W. Finney Avenue, Suffolk

Healthy choice breakfast served

Keynote Speaker: Jill Hanken, Esq.

Staff Attorney, Virginia Poverty Law Center, Inc.

REGISTER at www.obicihcf.org by April 26, 2012

PANEL DISCUSSION

Featuring

Thaler McCormick

Chief Executive
ForKids, Inc.



John Skirven

Chief Executive
Senior Services of Southeastern
Virginia



Virginia Legal Aid Helps Family Obtain Disability Benefits

by Beth Doyle, Virginia Legal Aid Society, Inc.

We all know what a luxury it is to have full insurance coverage for our medical bills, but most of us hope we never need to know what a blessing it is to receive disability benefits. "If you are eligible for disability then you are typically in a very bad way," according to Kathy Shea-Sword, Virginia Legal Aid Society (VLAS) Senior Attorney.

Suffolk residents Robert and Jodi Shawley thought they had planned properly for their future. They owned their home, had savings and an IRA and were life-long workers. But in 2007, Robert suffered serious complications from a fairly routine surgery to remove kidney stones, and the Shawleys found themselves in a desperate situation.

The complications left Robert with episodes of total paralysis. His neurosurgeon said it was a miracle that he was standing, let alone walking. Robert was unable to work, and Jodi had to quit her job to care for him. The Shawleys quickly began to deplete their cash and savings. "We had to seek assistance from local food banks, churches and the Salvation Army to help with food and even some utility bills," Robert noted. "This was a very humbling and enlightening experience."

Following Robert's second surgery, his doctor told him that he would not be able to work again and that he should file for disability benefits. The Shawley's situation was desperate, and as they explained "was a result of a horrible and tragic accident, which was completely unforeseen and we had no control of."

Living with constant pain, Robert filed for disability

benefits but he was denied at the initial level and again at the reconsideration level. After filing a request for a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ), Robert went to Virginia Legal Aid Society (VLAS) for help.



Robert Shawley expressed gratitude to Virginia Legal Aid Society Senior Attorney Kathy Shea-Sword for helping him obtain disability benefits.

"...most of us hope we never need to know what a blessing it is to receive disability benefits."

VLAS accepted Robert's case, researched and gathered evidence and represented him at his hearing. Thanks to Kathy, his attorney, the judge ruled in November 2011 that Robert was found disabled and the judge established his disability as of June 2009, the date of his initial application.

Robert now receives a monthly income from Social Security disability benefits and retroactive services that enabled the Shawleys to meet their obligations and pay Robert's medical expenses. As a result of Kathy's help, Robert was also found Medicare-eligible, which will help pay for his ongoing medical care.

Now, the Shawleys are fighting to save their house. "When you have healthcare issues, it affects your whole life. We are blessed to have found Virginia Legal Aid."

HEALTHCARE REFORM IMPROVES INSURANCE ACCESS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Tammie Mullins Rice and her daughter, Marissa, were excited about the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). One aspect of the law piqued their interest: the provision that allows young adults to remain on a parent's health insurance plan up to age 26.

Previously, insurance companies could remove enrolled children at age 19, with few exceptions for full-time students.

Marissa is a 22 year old Oklahoma State University graduate student who now maintains access to medical care coverage at an affordable cost thanks to her mom's health insurance plan. Tammie is a program officer at the Obici Healthcare Foundation.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, children can join or remain on their parent's plan if they are not married, do not live with

their parents, attend school, are not financially dependent on their parents, and are eligible to enroll in the employer's plan.



The Affordable Care Act made it possible for Tammie Mullins-Rice to keep her daughter Marissa on her health insurance plan after she graduated from Virginia Tech in 2011.