5 Ways to Get Teens Enrolled

Teens may be eligible for free or low-cost health insurance through Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Yet, eligible teens, 13 and older, are less likely to be enrolled than younger children. Medicaid and CHIP cover many services that are especially useful for teens, such as annual check-ups, substance abuse programs and mental health services.

Here are five ways to increase teen enrollment in Medicaid and CHIP:

1. **Collaborate with school-based health centers (SBHCs).** School-based health centers provide a wide variety of health services to students from kindergarten through high school. These services include routine physicals, vaccinations, dental and oral care, treatment of injuries and illnesses as well as reproductive health services, mental health counselling and treatment for alcohol and drug use. Teens also trust the care they get at school-based clinics. A 2013 survey by the Oregon School-Based Health Alliance (OSBHA) found 98 percent of teens are comfortable receiving care at their SBHC, 97 percent find it easy to talk to health center staff and 80 percent are unlikely to receive health care from any other source. Working with these trusted providers to enroll teens in Medicaid and CHIP can help increase teen enrollment rates.

   OUTREACH IN ACTION: OSBHA started an enrollment campaign to reduce the uninsured rate at their schools—either enrolling eligible teens in Medicaid and CHIP directly, or referring them to a local application assister. OSBHA learned through this outreach that the best way to communicate with teens is through text messaging and visual images on social media. Teens also mentioned that incentives like gift cards would encourage them come to a yearly exam.

2. **Work with programs that attract older teens.** Local high schools may offer driver's education classes as well as SAT and college preparatory classes that attract teenage students. Contact your school district to see if there are ways to provide information about health coverage in registration materials or provide enrollment assistance before or after classes. Community colleges, vocational and trade schools or scholarship organizations provide good ways to connect with teens preparing for college or those who start focusing on their careers or may not be enrolled at a traditional high school. Many college freshmen will also still be eligible for Medicaid and CHIP.

OUTREACH IN ACTION: Washtenaw Health Plan in Michigan developed a multi-layered program to reach uninsured teens—training case managers who work with adolescents, partnering with schools and conducting outreach directly to parents and teens. One effort focuses on older teens and their parents through programs at local universities and community colleges. Washtenaw provides enrollment assistance by appointment or on-site and collaborates with financial aid offices to help identify students who may be eligible for Medicaid and CHIP.

3. **Look beyond schools to connect with teens.** Think about expanding your outreach to places where teens work and play—local businesses, church groups and youth organizations, as well as hangouts such as parks and recreation centers, shopping malls, teen centers, coffee shops, movie theaters, concert venues and more. Customize and share Campaign materials, including the public service announcement or the teen flyer available in English and Spanish, and share them with these local venues to help raise awareness about free or low-cost health coverage. The flyer can be posted on bulletin boards, stuffed into paycheck envelopes or hung in staff break rooms, for example.

4. **Work with trusted adults such as mentors, coaches, teachers and school staff.** Teens may be more independent than younger children, but they still interact and rely on adults daily. Identify adults who work closely with teens since they can drive home the importance of having health coverage. Mentorship programs—such as **Big Brothers, Big Sisters**—are great places to begin outreach to teens. Additionally, consider reaching out to school-based organizations that work with social workers, counselors, nurses, as well as school activity directors, coaches, and teachers. For example, school counselors can distribute outreach materials and guide students and their families to enrollment assistance. The **American School Counselor Association (ASCA)** suggests sharing information through high school report cards, progress reports and important school emails. Find your local chapter of ASCA to discuss ways to work together to get eligible teens enrolled. School social workers also work closely with teenage students and can be an invaluable partner in making sure teens have the health care they need. Contact the local **School Social Work Association of America** chapter in your state.

   OUTREACH IN ACTION: The Family Healthcare Foundation in Tampa, Florida partners with school social workers in local districts to identify uninsured children and teens. Social workers refer families to the Foundation to help enroll kids into Florida KidCare. In addition, the Foundation attends school social worker meetings to provide training about the Florida KidCare program and share outreach materials, including Connecting Kids to Coverage Campaign resources, which social workers can distribute to families. The Foundation notes that school social workers provide one of the largest numbers of referrals for application assistance. High school coaches have close relationships with their athletes—check out the **Get Covered. Get in the Game. Strategy Guide**.

5. **Reach vulnerable teens.** Youth aging out of foster care and homeless youth often lack access to vital health services. The Affordable Care Act extends Medicaid coverage to former foster youth until they are 26 years old. Outreach in Action: The National 2 Council on Health Care for the Homeless has an outreach toolkit that includes promising strategies for reaching people experiencing homelessness.

   OUTREACH IN ACTION: Consider how you can adapt your outreach materials specifically to teens. In Maryland, Advocates for Children and Youth designed youth-friendly outreach materials to inform foster youth about a new Affordable Care Act (ACA) provision to extend Medicaid coverage to former foster youth until the age of 26. They also worked with former foster youth in Baltimore to create anoriginal song and slideshow to assist with outreach to their peers. And in California, Children Now, Youth Law Center and California Youth Connection have partnered to develop a website with tips, resources and tools aimed at foster youth and advocates.