

North Dakota Navigator Project Testimony to the Interim Legislative Committee on Healthcare Reform

July 23, 2014

Neil Scharpe, Project Director

North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (NDCPD)

Minot State University (MSU)

On August 15, 2013 CMS awarded the Navigator cooperative agreement to NDCPD in an amount of \$414,000. To provide statewide coverage we partnered with three organizations; Family Voices of ND, the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and DLN Consulting, Inc. with each organization and NDCPD being responsible for the counties within designated Human Services regions.

By October 1, 2013 we had eight certified Navigators representing seven of the eight regions with the Dickinson region coming on line in November. To date we have 13 Navigators. All Navigators understand the importance of public awareness and as such have put a great emphasis on presenting the basics of the ACA in small and large group settings.

All 13 ND Navigators attend a weekly conference call to discuss specific consumer situations that have arisen over the past week. At this time enrollment events are shared and ideas for reaching the population are discussed. In addition, there is a weekly conference call with the Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Health Board, Community Healthcare of the Dakotas, South Dakota Navigator Project and other state offices to coordinate activities.

Over the course of our project we have printed and distributed over 6,000 brochures, 1100 fliers, 2500 handouts and 150 posters. We have made 160 presentations using specifically designed PowerPoint presentations. Navigators have conducted 600 outreach events involving over 5000 participants. We have assisted nearly 4000 people in setting up a profile in the Marketplace with most of those choosing a qualified health plan or Medicaid Expansion.

Navigators in North Dakota had varying success, but found public libraries especially in small communities very helpful. County extension offices also were good places to disseminate information and bring people together. Other agencies were Human Service Centers, Volunteer

Income Tax Assistance (VITA), local health insurance companies, and social service offices. Navigators found more success when they would partner with a local organization as opposed to setting up without a sponsor organization. The least effective places seemed to be four year colleges/universities. Several events targeted farmers/ranchers and families of children with special healthcare needs. We also targeted Head Start programs because we believed there was a need for parents to have healthcare coverage.

As the lead agency, NDCPD, opened a web page housed on the NDCPD web platform at Minot State University www.ndcpd.org/navigator. The project director also participated in over 10 radio shows and one TV show in which the ACA and sign up events were highlighted. Our understanding was that CMS would be providing print material for dissemination and stock press release announcements. When that did not happen we used the CMS brochure and made our own copies. All Navigators were given business cards with their contact info on one side and Healthcare.gov stock information on the other. We partnered with several organizations to do radio advertising for enrollment events. We printed fliers that were hung in communities to advertise location of sign up assistance. In several cases press releases were used to notify the public of a Navigators presence at a library. One of our partners, Family Voices, used their e-newsletter to broadcast events.

Because many North Dakota consumers live in rural areas reaching them can best be done through radio and newspaper. As Project Director, I have participated in ten radio interviews regarding the need for consumers to sign up for health insurance. In addition I have done two Associated Press interviews with the subsequent articles being published in four state newspapers.

A very well publicized sign-up event was held in the state capitol, Bismarck on March 20-21 in which we had a press conference attended by radio, TV, and print newspaper representatives. Region VIII HHS Director, Kim Gillan was in attendance for the press conference.

During the open enrollment period the majority of consumers were served via the telephone with a large number also seen in person. Navigators reported continued need to meet more than one time with consumers due to long wait times when using the website and/or the 1-800

number. While we did not document the actual time spent with each consumer, Navigators estimate that each enrollment averaged 2-3 hours of their time which usually included multiple sessions. During March the website worked much better and wait times were reduced significantly.

Very high volumes of calls/contacts happened during the last two weeks in March and the first week in April as consumers attempted to beat the deadline.

During the past three months Navigators reported working with consumers to “fix” problems that had occurred during initial enrollment. These situations took many contact hours to resolve. These “fixes” ranged from enrollment in both Medicaid Expansion and a qualified plan to assisting consumers with a change of address. Our work continues in that we are assisting consumers who have or will lose coverage.

To date Navigators have not reported any consumer that expressed frustration with the assistance they have received from Navigators. There have been many families who have been very grateful for the assistance we have provided. Navigators report consumers calling back and reporting successful results when they have been assisted via the phone.

Our efforts until August 14, 2014, which is the end of our current cooperative agreement, will be to assist the American Indian consumers in collaboration with the Tribal Chairman’s Health Board and to continue outreach efforts by presenting at local and state events to alert North Dakotans of the next open enrollment date of November 15, 2014.

The latest numbers indicate about 10,000 NDs chose a plan through the Marketplace and another 10,000 enrolled in Medicaid Expansion. Based on initial CMS estimates this is nearly 30% of the uninsured population. With all of the complications consumers endured that is a considerable achievement.

NDCPD has responded to a funding announcement by CMS for Navigator duties in 2014-15 that would begin on September 8, 2014. This is a competitive award so there is no assurance we will receive an award. During the time from August 15-September 8 current Navigators will not be

authorized to provide assistance. If we are chosen all current Navigators will need to be recertified prior to assisting consumers.

Thank you for the opportunity to update the committee on our efforts.