



Contact: Jeffrey N. Maclin
(212) 614-5538 (office)
(718) 309-2346 (cell)
jmaclin@cssny.org
www.cssny.org

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The Community Service Society of New York and 13 Business-Serving Groups Launch First-in-Nation Small Business Health Coverage Assistance Program

Over half a million dollars in grant funding to help New York's small businesses with their health insurance and health care needs

New York, NY - After a highly competitive procurement process, The Community Service Society (CSS) today announced over half a million dollars in grant awards to 13 business-serving groups to help small businesses in their communities with health care and health insurance problems. CSS received bids from more than 30 groups vying for funding.

Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), states can set up Health Insurance Exchanges, or marketplaces, where individuals and small businesses can shop for and enroll into health coverage. To help ensure that New York's Small Business Exchange best meets the needs of New York's employers and employees, CSS is launching a pilot Small Business Assistance Program to educate small businesses about the health reform law, address their current insurance coverage needs and help inform the design and development of the State's Small Business Exchange.

"This is a new and innovative program to target and support small businesses as they make their way through the bewildering morass of our health care system" said David R. Jones, President and CEO of The Community Service Society. "New York's small businesses will have an advocate on their side."

"The model for this new program is our very own Community Health Advocates (CHA), which for the last decade has helped more than 200,000 New Yorkers navigate the health care system," said Elisabeth R. Benjamin, Vice President of Health Initiatives at The Community Service Society. "With this outstanding statewide partnership, we can now join our expertise with trusted groups to address the health coverage and costs issues faced by New York's small businesses."

The Small Business Assistance Program will provide education and assistance to small businesses about: the availability of small business tax credits; health insurance and care options for small businesses and their employees; how to understand and comment upon proposed insurance rate increases under New York's new prior approval law; how to work with brokers; and the pros and cons of Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) and other small group products.

The grantees are as follows:

- Asian Americans for Equality (New York City)
- Brooklyn Alliance
- Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation
- Capital District Black Chamber of Commerce (Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady counties)
- Chautauqua County Chamber of Commerce
- Greater New York Chamber of Commerce, BALCONY, and the NYC Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (New York City, Westchester, Long Island)
- Greater Oswego-Fulton Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce Foundation (Seneca, Cayuga, Cortland, Onondaga, Oneida counties)
- Make the Road (Long Island)
- NY Women's Chamber of Commerce (New York City)
- Queens Chamber of Commerce
- Staten Island Chamber of Commerce
- Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce.

About CSS

The Community Service Society draws on a 168-year history of excellence in addressing the root causes of economic disparity. As a leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers and the working poor, CSS responds to urgent, contemporary problems through applied research, advocacy and litigation, and innovative program models that strengthen and benefit all New Yorkers and help promote a more prosperous city. Visit www.cssny.org.

About Community Health Advocates (CHA)

CSS operates Community Health Advocates, offering free health insurance consumer assistance, which served more than 45,000 New Yorkers in the past 18 months through one-on-one counseling sessions and educational workshops instructing clients how to sign up for, use, and keep health insurance. CHA is an “all-payer” program, helping people with public (Medicaid, Medicare, Family Health Plus, Child Health Plus) and private insurance as well as the uninsured. Since its inception in 1999, it has assisted more than 200,000 individuals. CHA works with a network of 30 community-based organizations throughout the State as well as three specialist agencies: Empire Justice Center, Legal Aid Society of New York, and Medicare Rights Center. CHA offers services in 14 different languages. Visit www.communityhealthadvocates.org