CALIFORNIANS for PATIENT CARE

November 16, 2012

Peter V. Lee, Executive Director
California Health Benefit Exchange
2535 Capitol Oaks Drive, Suite 120
Sacramento, CA 95833

Re: Marketing & Outreach Updated Plan Presented 11/14/12

Dear Mr. Lee and Members of the Board:

On behalf of Californians for Patient Care, thank you for the work Covered California has done in designing its Marketing and Outreach Plan. As an independent, nonprofit, patient-advocacy and consumer-assistance organization, Californians for Patient Care supports the scope and direction of the plan; however, we do have an issue of concern that may negatively impact the rate of enrollment in Covered California.

Californians for Patient Care believes the issues regarding general literacy and health literacy may need to be given greater emphasis in the Marketing and Outreach Plan, and in the development and implementation of the online portal itself.

Background
In 1991, Congress defined literacy as: "An individual's ability to read, write and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential."

In its Healthy People 2012 report, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defined health literacy as: "The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions."

Implications
The National Center of Adult Literacy reports that 40 million adults in the U.S. read and write at or below the 5th grade level. Combine that with the findings from the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality Report, "Health Literacy Interventions and Outcomes: An Update of the Literacy and Health Outcomes Systematic Review of the Literature," which indicates that only 12 percent of the adults living in the United States have a proficient health literacy level and that 41 percent of Hispanics scored at the "below basic" health literacy level. And according to statistics provided by North Carolina State University's Center for Student Leadership, Ethics and Public Service, nearly 75% of people who are jobless, have reading and writing difficulties.

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For these and other reasons, Californians for Patient Care is concerned with the communications methodology of the Covered California online portal and its Marketing and Outreach Plan. We, therefore, encourage the testing of common communication assumptions and suggest exploring other ways of communicating with people who may be very interested in obtaining health insurance and who may also have low literacy and health literacy rates. For example, is Covered California considering the use of common symbols and colors to convey its eligibility and enrollment messages? Will there be options for audio materials or the use of visual aids to inform those with literacy challenges?

Recommendation

Californians for Patient Care respectfully requests Covered California research best practices related to general literacy and health literacy and incorporate them into the development of the Covered California online portal and in its Marketing and Outreach Plan.

Like Covered California, Californians for Patient Care believes that millions of Californians will benefit from the implementation of healthcare reform and the healthcare exchange. We also believe that by incorporating best practices related to general literacy and health literacy, Covered California will increase its chances of a successful launch and sustained enrollment.

Sincerely,

Carmella Gutierrez
President