New Resources Help States Implement Affordable Care Act

Today, Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced a new funding opportunity for grants to help states continue their work to implement a key provision of the Affordable Care Act – Health Insurance Exchanges. When the Affordable Care Act is fully implemented in 2014, Health Insurance Exchanges will provide individuals and small businesses with a “one-stop shop” to find and compare affordable, high-quality health insurance options.

“These grants will help ensure states have the resources they need to establish exchanges and ensure Americans are no longer on their own when shopping for insurance," said Sebelius. Health Insurance Exchanges will aim to bring new transparency to the market so that consumers will be able to compare plans based on price and quality and offer everyone the same insurance choices as members of Congress. By increasing competition among insurance companies and allowing individuals and small businesses to band together to purchase insurance, Exchanges should also lower costs.

States that are moving ahead on a faster pace can apply for multi-year funding. States that are making progress in establishing their Exchange through a step-by-step approach can apply for funding for each project year. Moving forward, states will have multiple opportunities to apply for funding as they progress through Exchange establishment. States can use the Exchange establishment grants for a number of different activities, including conducting background research, consulting with stakeholders, making legislative and regulatory changes, governing the exchange, establishing information technology systems, conducting financial management and performing oversight.

States are already taking their first steps toward 2014 when Health Insurance Exchanges will be operational. For example, California signed first-in-the-nation legislation to implement a Health Insurance Exchange under the Affordable Care Act last September. Maryland’s Health Reform Coordinating Council has already carried out research to understand the state’s health insurance marketplace and health expenditures, as well as how to make health care costs and quality more transparent. Colorado is holding regular community forums on issues around developing an Exchange, as well as conducting extensive research and economic analyses on the state’s health insurance market.

Many of those activities have been funded by the $49 million in Exchange planning grants awarded by HHS in July of 2010. States applied to use those grants for a number of important planning activities including research to understand their insurance markets, efforts to obtain the legislative authority to create Exchanges, and steps to establishing the governing structures of Exchanges.

More information can be found at http://www.healthcare.gov/news/factsheets [1].

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