

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244



DATE: October 15, 2014

TO: Hispanic Heritage Webinar Participants

FROM: Marilyn Tavenner, MHA
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SUBJECT: Introductory Remarks: “From Coverage to Care: Connecting the Hispanic Community to New Opportunities for Better Health” Webinar

I’m pleased to be here today to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. I want to thank each of our speakers for joining us in this important conversation, and I want to thank the CMS Office of Minority Health, and the Office of Equal Employment and Civil Rights, for organizing today’s discussion.

Every year, from September 15 to October 15, when we celebrate the history, cultures, and contributions of Hispanic Americans we consider those whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America, and we take the opportunity to share their rich history. The theme for this year is a legacy of history.

- Action now.
- A future of success.

Today’s discussion, “From Coverage to Care: Connecting the Hispanic Community to New Opportunities for Better Health,” is a great way to focus on our present actions that will ensure future success—a future when all Hispanic Americans have access to quality health coverage and are able to understand and use it to get the care they need.

Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, millions of Americans have access to health coverage, including many Hispanics. In addition to taking significant steps to expand coverage and improve access to care, CMS has also taken steps to improve the quality of care received by all Americans.

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During open enrollment more than 8 million Americans selected a plan through the Marketplace, and among those who reported their race and ethnicity, more than 10 percent were Hispanic Americans. Millions more enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP. National surveys indicate that the number of Americans with health insurance coverage is growing, and the number of 18 to 64 year olds who are uninsured is declining. This is more good news!

While we have made great strides in improving access to high quality coverage for some members of the Hispanic community, we know we still have work to do. Despite the progress we've made, the uninsured rate for Hispanics remains significantly higher than that for non-Hispanic Whites. Moreover, many indicators of health care quality are improving for everyone, but the gaps between Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites remain largely unchanged.

CMS is committed to strengthening and modernizing the nation's health care system to provide access to high quality care and improved health at lower cost. Mayra [Alvarez] will tell you how we are building on the lessons learned during the last open enrollment as we prepare for next month, where we hope to continue our efforts to ensure that health coverage is more accessible than ever before, for families and business owners. You will also hear from Cara [James], who will tell you about an effort to help consumers who are new to coverage understand it, be able to use it, and get the care they need to help them live long and healthy lives.

Although Hispanic Heritage Month ends today, our commitment to take action now to ensure a future of success will not. We are fortunate to have the Office of Equal Employment and Civil Rights, and the CMS Office of Minority Health, to help lead us in this effort. Both of these offices are working across CMS to achieve health equity for all CMS beneficiaries. Among other things, the Office of Equal Employment and Civil Rights is leading the implementation of the new CMS Language Access Plan. In addition to helping newly covered consumers understand their coverage, the CMS Office of Minority Health is strengthening our data to help identify disparities and monitoring progress in our efforts to reduce them. I know that through these and other ongoing activities, and through our partnerships with many of you who are participating in this webinar, we will achieve a future of success for the Hispanic community. Once again, I want to thank all of you for joining us today, and look forward to our continued collaboration.

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