



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Community Recommendations to Improve Access to The Healthcare Alliance Program

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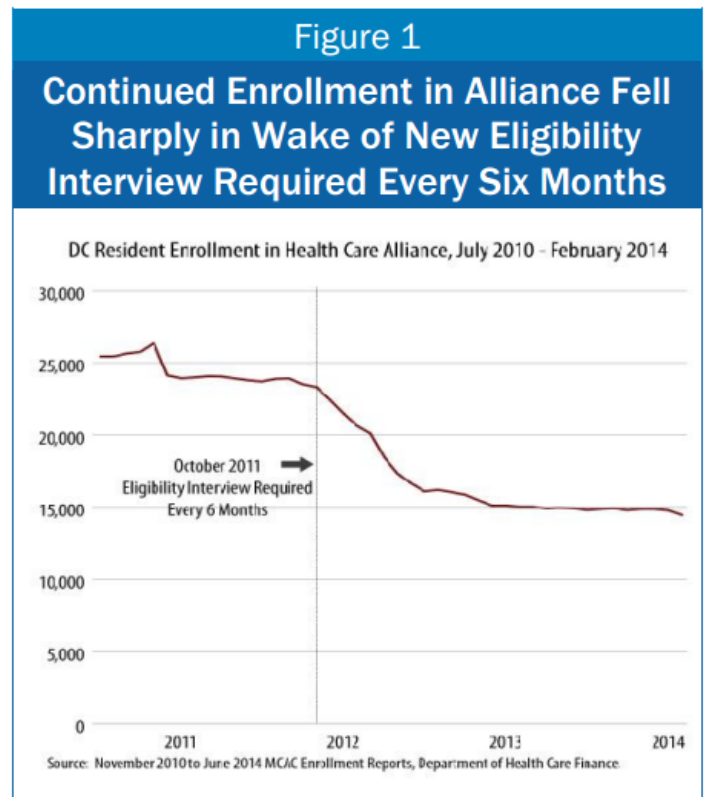
The District's Healthcare Alliance programs help low-income immigrant residents get needed health care, but many residents struggle to access their Alliance benefits simply due to burdensome eligibility procedures. That's why DCFPI and other advocates sent a letter to the city's health care leadership in support of needed changes to make the program more accessible.

The District adopted a stringent requirement in 2011 that all Alliance participants recertify their eligibility every six months through an in-person interview at a service center. Since then, enrollment has dropped sharply (see **Figure 1**), and new data from the Department of Health Care Finance suggest that the six-month interview requirement created a barrier to getting services.

This is not surprising. Workers with limited access to child care and full-time work find it difficult to complete the frequent interview requirement. Beyond that, many families are forced to make multiple trips because of a lack of language assistance, long lines, and delays in staff processing information.

In September, three major changes to improve the Alliance program were identified at a meeting between DC's Department of Health Care Finance and community organizations. Our letter supports these actions:

Change the face-to-face interview to an annual interview. An annual recertification period will help Alliance members who must take time off of work to do the interview. It will also help program staff by lessening the number of clients they have to see and improving their ability to assist individual cases.



Allow community health workers to assist with parts of the recertification. If Alliance beneficiaries can complete their recertification with community health workers, the applications will have fewer problems, be processed faster, reducing the need for residents to make multiple trips. These workers already have strong relationships with the Alliance community, and can help alleviate language and cultural barriers in the application process.

Allow Alliance participants to apply online. DC has a new online public benefits system for Medicaid that uses many existing databases to verify identity and residency. Yet the Alliance program still uses a paper application. Fully incorporating the Alliance into the electronic application process would mean that many beneficiaries would *never* need to visit a service center in person.

The District takes pride in the fact that almost every resident has access to health coverage and services. The recommended changes to the Alliance program would ensure that residents not only have access to health care, but can keep their coverage. We hope the Department of Health Care Finance and the DC Council will approve these changes and continue their commitment toward health care for all.