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California Receives \$4.6 million to Enhance Health Care Consumer Assistance Program

Federal Grant will Expand Local Consumer Assistance Availability, Create Resources Tailored to Seniors and Californians with Disabilities and Improve Data Collection on Consumer Issues

SACRAMENTO - The California Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC) was awarded \$4.6 million in federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) funding to further enhance California's health care consumer assistance program, director Brent A. Barnhart announced today. The California Department of Insurance (CDI) and the Office of the Patient Advocate (OPA) partnered with DMHC on the grant application.

"This new federal funding will enable us to help more Californians get the health care coverage they need and access to the care they are entitled to," said DMHC director Brent Barnhart.

"With today's announcement, we plan to build upon our successful program that provides free in-person, online or over-the-phone assistance to Californians struggling to navigate the complex health care system."

"This additional ACA funding will allow us to further enhance our efforts in helping Californians meet their health care needs," Insurance Commissioner Dave Jones said. "Ensuring that consumers receive the support and the assistance they need as they evaluate their health care options is a priority at CDI, and this additional support is a welcome development."

"These new funds will support OPA's first-time effort to collect and publicly report complaint data across both private and public health care coverage systems," said OPA director Sandra Perez. "This data will be an important resource for consumers to make informed health care choices and for policy makers to address emerging issues."

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Specifically, the grant funds will be used to:

- Expand partnerships with non-profit community-based organizations to provide direct, local consumer assistance;
- Create accessible health care consumer information and resources for seniors and Californians with disabilities;
- Expand resources and training materials for consumer assistance organizations;
- Develop recommendations to standardize and improve data collection and reporting of consumer issues and their resolutions;
- Enhance DMHC and CDI's administrative and technical capacity to assist consumers.

California received the largest consumer assistance grant in the nation. This is the second consumer assistance grant awarded to the DMHC by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The DMHC regulates managed care health plans in California, protects the rights of approximately 20 million health plan enrollees, educates consumers on their health care rights and responsibilities, and preserves the financial stability of the managed health care system. Since 2000, the department has helped more than 1 million Californians resolve health plan problems through its Help Center. Information and assistance is available 24/7 at www.HealthHelp.ca.gov or by calling 1-888-466-2219.

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