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Oregon Health Authority helps Coast Community Health Center outreach

Coast Community Health Center Jul 25, 2016



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Lennae Wright and Kim Trimble are available for free, confidential health insurance enrollments appointments at Coast Community Health Center's Bandon and Port Orford offices.

BANDON — Choosing the right health insurance plan is an important health decision for every individual. Coast Community Health Center is excited to announce continued funding by the Oregon Health Authority for insurance enrollment assistance for residents in southern Coos and northern Curry counties.

The insurance enrollment process can be complicated, said Leesa Cobb, Executive Director of the Port Orford Ocean Resource Team and Coast Community Health Center board director.

"This grant from OHA provides another year of continued funds to pay for the assisters who have been helping people in our community get signed up. This is a terrific opportunity for local folks to access (health) insurance coverage and get health care services," Cobb said.

Public funding allows Coast Community Health Center to provide free, confidential enrollment information to health center patients and area residents. The health center is in a unique position as a Federally Qualified Health Center to include community health outreach and enrollment workers as members of the health team.

"They can help us address those barriers that are outside the clinical space. They model to people how to be successful managing health goals," said behavioral health counselor Rich Standiford.

Between July 2015 and June 2016, enrollment assisters from health centers and other human services organizations helped facilitate 514 Oregon Health Plan and private federal insurance marketplace sign-ups for families in Bandon, Langlois and Port Orford. Coast Community Health Center staff assisted with 405 of those household applications or policy renewals, which represent 1,060 adults and children.

Outreach workers and enrollment assisters are trained to help individuals and families navigate the online federal insurance marketplace at healthcare.gov. Area residents can check their eligibility, enroll and re-enroll in the Oregon Health Plan, Oregon's public insurance plan for adults and children. OHP enrollment is open year round, and eligibility is based on several factors, including household income. Assistters can also help with enrollment in private insurance plans through the insurance marketplace.

Bringing information to all

A personal touch eases the conversation about complex topics such as health insurance. That's why health center staff take their message to community events and meeting spots. Kim Trimble is the enrollment assister for the health center's Port Orford office. She's scheduled enrollment appointments with many individuals who first learned about the service at the Langlois Public Library.

Cynthia Shields, assistant librarian at the Langlois Library helped organize monthly outreach events at the library in January through April.

"We had all sorts of people come in from all walks of life," said Shields.

Event attendance was slow at first but grew as word spread, said Shields. Visitors from Bandon, Langlois and Port Orford sat down with health center staff in a quiet corner of the library to have private conversations about health insurance options. They also learned about other health-related topics and programs for immunizations, housing, and Oregon's Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program.

"It's a positive thing for our little community," said Shields.

An economic boon

"Each time our health center receives a grant or develops a new service, we are not only investing in the health of the community; it is an economic investment in the future of the community, because a healthy community is an economically stable community," said Linda Maxon, health center executive director.

Coast Community Health Center was established as a nonprofit rural health center in 2009 and started clinical operations as Bandon Community Health Center in 2010. The health center was approved as a Federally Qualified Health Center in the fall of 2013.

Between 2014 and 2015, the health center moved to its present, larger facility in Bandon and opened its Port Orford outreach office. Growth in services and locations prompted the center to adopt a new business name. The health center offers primary medical care and behavioral health counseling for patients of all ages. Public and private insurance is welcome, and payment choices include a sliding scale private pay option — no one is turned away for inability to pay.

"We have grown from six employees now to 23," said Maxon. "The jobs we have created are family wage jobs with benefits. We have developed jobs that allow local people to discover new careers in the health care field, some of which are non-traditional health care jobs that make a tremendous difference in the lives of our community members."


Competitive OHA insurance enrollment assistance grants are made available to community health centers throughout the state. The health center will utilize the 2016 award of \$100 thousand for staff time and training and will recruit an additional enrollment assister to serve Port Orford area residents.

"We are grateful to the Oregon Health Authority to receive this grant award for a second consecutive year," said Maxon. "Last year we far exceeded our goals in the number of applications we assisted with and lives our assisters touched in being advocates for community members who needed help with their Medicaid coverage.

"This year OHA awarded a mix of grants, to both existing grantees in renewing their grants, and new grantees. With our grant, we will expand the services offered in Curry County and partner with more agencies in this region."

For insurance enrollment assistance appointments, call the Bandon office at 541-347-2529, or the Port Orford office at 541-332-1114. Find more information at coastcommunityhealth.org/insurance-enrollment-assistance.

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