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Providing a Range of Perspectives on Health Care Policy

Alliance for Health Reform conducts issue briefings on health and health care policy

SUMMARY

From 2008 to 2011, the Alliance for Health Reform conducted briefings, created resources, and distributed materials for journalists and national policy-makers seeking a range of perspectives on health policy challenges.

Based in Washington, the alliance is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that focuses on affordable, high-quality health care for all Americans. It has worked with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to hold briefings and provide information on health care policy since 1997.[1]

The Alliance for Health Reform commissioned Health Policy Alternatives, Inc., also in Washington, to assess its work. The researchers conducted telephone interviews with eight congressional staff, seven journalists, and seven health care analysts and advocates. (For findings from this assessment, see Key Findings.)

Key Results

In a report to RWJF, the Alliance for Health Reform cited these results. Project staff:

- Conducted 12 briefings on Capitol Hill (two of which were broadcast by C-SPAN) for more than 4,000 congressional and executive-branch staff, reporters, and representatives of health-related organizations. Briefing topics included:
  - "Healing Body and Mind: Behavioral Health Reform" (co-sponsored by the Open Society Institute)
  - "Children's Health Coverage: Medicaid, CHIP, and Next Steps"
  - "Health Reform Implementation: When Sausage-Making Moves Downtown"

[1] See Program Results Reports on (1) the impact of managed care on vulnerable populations, (2) children's health insurance, (3) potential abuses of confidentiality of medical information, (4) briefings of congress and journalists, and (5) briefings of congress and the press; and (6) to prepare staff of congressional committees for the health reform debate.

— "50 Ways to Implement Health Reform: State Challenges and Federal Assistance"

See the Bibliography for more information.

- Produced nine issue briefs to supplement the briefings. Project staff distributed print copies to each member of Congress, and promoted digital versions via email and Twitter. (See the Bibliography for titles of the briefs and links to them online.)
- Conducted five briefings for nearly 200 journalists at the National Press Club in Washington, two of which were televised by C-SPAN:

  — "How Wide Has the Window Opened for Health Reform?"

  — "Consumer Choice in Health Care: How Could Reform Affect Our Choices? How Could We Make Better Choices?"

  — "The Next 100 Days: Some Final Hurdles to Health Reform"

  — "What's Next? Reporting on Health Reform Between Now and 2014"

  — "What Does the Election Mean for Health Reform and Other Issues?"

  Project staff posted a webcast, transcript, and podcast of all 17 briefings on the websites of the Alliance for Health Reform and the Kaiser Family Foundation.

- Held individual and small-group meetings with 38 Washington-based reporters to discuss story ideas related to health policy. The reporters were from National Public Radio, the *Los Angeles Times*, Reuters, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and Bloomberg, among other media outlets.
- Created the fourth and fifth editions of the alliance's *Covering Health Issues: A Sourcebook for Journalists*. Alliance staff distributed print copies to more than 4,000 reporters, each congressional office, and health journalism students, and posted English and Spanish versions on the alliance website.

  Alliance staff also updated each chapter of the online version between print editions, to reflect provisions of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, signed into law in March 2010.

- Produced 13 short videos featuring health policy experts explaining how the Affordable Care Act affects specific groups of Americans, such as small employers, Medicare beneficiaries, and young people. The alliance website links to the videos on YouTube and Vimeo (video-sharing websites). (See the Bibliography for details.)
- Expanded and promoted the alliance's Find-an-Expert database. This links reporters with 529 experts on 36 health policy topics and more than 100 subtopics.
- Promoted the webcasts, podcasts, transcripts, sourcebook, Find-an-Expert, and videos to hundreds of political reporters, editorial writers, and bloggers via email and

Twitter. Staff used a subscription to Meltwater News, which allows media searches, to send customized information to reporters on particular topics.

Key Findings About the Alliance

According to the researchers at Health Policy Alternatives who assessed the alliances work:

- *The Alliance for Health Reform "is remarkably successful" in meeting the needs of its target audience*. Interviewees:
  - Said the alliance strikes the right balance, presenting a range of perspectives in a nonpartisan way
  - Praised the *Sourcebook*. In the words of one journalist, "If my house was on fire, and I could only save one thing, I would grab the *Sourcebook*."
  - Had mixed opinions on the issue briefs. While some interviewees found the briefs concise, well-written, and balanced, others said they were too basic.
- *The alliance should continue to refine its services.* Interviewees suggested that the alliance:
  - Provide more in-depth briefings for small groups of congressional staff
  - Provide separate videos of each speaker at a briefing, as viewing a complete webcast of a briefing is too time consuming
  - Host a series of briefings on one subject, to enable participants to drill down more deeply

Lessons Learned

1. **When holding briefings on health policy, do not lock in the topic too far in advance**. "Attendance is highest when the topic is under active debate in Congress," said alliance Executive Vice President Ed Howard, JD. "Thus, we try to settle on a topic no more than six weeks before each briefing."
2. **Time briefings to take advantage of the congressional schedule**. Attendance among congressional staff is highest at noon on Mondays—usually before the House and Senate have convened—and at noon on Fridays, when the chambers are nearing adjournment for the week, according to Howard.

Funding

RWJF provided a grant of $1,606,072 to support this project.

Afterward

The alliance received a $577,030 grant[2] from RWJF from September 2011 through August 2012. Under that grant, in addition to conducting briefings on Capitol Hill and at the National Press Club, the alliance is partnering with the Association of Health Care Journalists to hold briefings for reporters in Atlanta, Cleveland, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco on state-level implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

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[2] ID# 69127.

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Books

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Covering Health Issues: A Sourcebook for Journalists, 6th edition. Washington: Alliance for Health Reform, 2011. Available online.

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Issue or Policy Briefs

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Communications or Promotions

Congressional and Press Briefings

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"Healing Mind and Body: Behavioral Health and Reform," July 17, 2009, Washington. Some 245 people registered. Webcast downloaded at least 290 times, and landing page accessed more than 6,400 times, as of September 2011. Proceedings and materials available online.

"Expanding Access to Care: More than Just an Insurance Card?" August 10, 2009, Washington. Webcast downloaded at least 840 times, and landing page accessed more than 6,700 times, as of September 2011. Proceedings and materials available online.

"Rural Health: Laying the Foundation for Health Reform," October 30, 2009, Washington. Some 248 people registered. Webcast downloaded at least 388 times, and landing page accessed more than 4,000 times, as of September 2011. Proceedings and materials available online.

"Children's Health Coverage: Medicaid, CHIP, and Next Steps," November 13, 2009, Washington. Some 316 people registered. Webcast downloaded at least 192 times, and landing page accessed more than 5,600 times, as of September 2011. Proceedings and materials available online.

"Health Reform Implementation: When Sausage-Making Moves Downtown," July 9, 2010, Washington. Some 422 registrants. Webcast downloaded at least 1,072 times, and landing page accessed more than 3,800 times, as of September 2011. Proceedings and materials available online.

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"The Next 100 Days: Some Final Hurdles to Health Reform," September 3, 2009, Washington. Some 44 reporters registered. Webcast downloaded at least 890 times, and landing page accessed more than 5,400 times, as of September 2011. Proceedings and materials available online.

"What's Next? Reporting on Health Reform Between Now and 2014," June 10, 2010, Washington. Some 52 reporters registered. Co-sponsored with the Association of Health Care Journalists. Landing page accessed more than 6,300 times as of September 2011. Proceedings and materials available online.

"What Does the Election Mean for Health Reform and Other Health Issues?" November 12, 2010, Washington. Some 63 reporters registered. Webcast downloaded at least 832 times, and landing page accessed more than 3,300 times, as of September 2011. Proceedings and materials available online.

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