

Health Care Needs for Former Foster Youth

Background

Each year, over 26,000 foster youth “age out” of the child welfare system in the United States. Between 2009 and 2013, approximately 3,000 Maryland youth aged out of foster care. Those youth are now eligible for a new provision under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). This new provision allows former foster youth to receive health care coverage through Medicaid until they reach age 26, as long as they were in foster care and enrolled in Medicaid when they aged out. The provision for former foster youth mirrors the provision that allows young adults to stay on their parent’s health insurance until they reach age 26.

Importance of Health Care

Transitioning foster youth have been shown to have an increased need for health care services due to past issues regarding abuse and neglect. In addition, this vulnerable population has an increased risk for mental health and chronic medical issues. Studies show that nearly 60 percent of children in foster care experience a chronic medical condition, with one-quarter suffering from three or more health conditions.¹ This new provision gives former foster youth the opportunity to access the services necessary to address their health care needs.

Many factors contribute to poor physical and mental health among this population. Poor health outcomes can be a result of homelessness, lack of education, lack of access to appropriate health services, and loss of or difficulty keeping a job. Foster youth transitioning to adulthood are at risk of

experiencing all of these factors, which in turn puts them at risk of poor health status throughout their lifespan. Studies have shown that social, emotional, and physical factors all contribute to the health and wellness of young people. Research also shows that youth in foster care have lower levels of well-being than their peers, and lack the resources and education to help make informed health-related decisions.² Educating these youth about the provisions of the ACA can help to increase their awareness and knowledge about what services are available in their communities and how to utilize them.

Outreach Efforts to Former Foster Youth

Over the past year, Advocates for Children and Youth has worked to educate former foster youth in Baltimore about the services available to them both before and after the ACA provision took effect in January 2014.

We identified key organizations that work with current, transitioning and former foster youth and have conducted “train the trainer” sessions to inform social workers, case managers, and other providers about health coverage options. We developed a fold-out information card for providers and youth that serves as a quick reference guide for understanding opportunities available to former foster youth.

Working with organizations like YO! Baltimore (Youth Opportunities East/West Baltimore) we were able to engage youth in activities that increased their knowledge about eligibility for and enrollment into Medicaid. The youth developed a song for outreach purposes, which can be found on our website.

¹Simms, M.D., Dubowitz, H., & Szilagyi, M.A. (2000). Needs of Children in the Foster Care System. *Pediatrics*, 106 (Supplement), 909-918; L.K.Leslie, M.S.Hurlburt, J.Landsverk, K.Kelleher et al. Comprehensive Assessments of Children Entering Foster Care: A National Perspective. *Pediatrics*, July 2003.

² Langford, Barbara.(2013). Framework for Well-Being for Older Youth in Foster Care. Foster Care Workgroup. Youth Transition Funders Group.

I S S U E B R I E F

Conversations with community-based groups highlighted the need for consistency in mental health providers for this population. Our work also confirmed and amplified our understanding of the importance of this new ACA provision for former foster youth.

As part of our commitment to improving the health status of all Maryland's youth, Advocates for Children and Youth will continue to identify barriers to accessing health care services as well as opportunities for transitioning foster youth that can improve their lives and well-being.

