



*"The Affordable Care Act is a health care law that aims to improve our current health care system by increasing access to health coverage for Americans and introducing new protections for people who have health insurance." Health Care and You
(www.healthcareandyou.org)*

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focus

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TOPIC WATCH

Each month we will feature a different topic; expanding the knowledge, resources, and peer networking in targeted areas. These target areas will include workforce development, transition, supported education, leadership, organizational development, sustainability, and others as they are identified.



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Affordable Care Act



As the Affordable Care Act (ACA) comes into effect, many people will be searching for answers regarding how it will or can impact them. It is no longer safe to assume that it will only affect those receiving publicly supported services, because the ACA sets standards and expectations that apply to all Americans. Whatever it looks like in its final form, the ACA will have an impact on every American and the way they access and pay for services, treatments, and supports.

The Affordable Care Act is intended to put in place strong consumer protections, provide new coverage options and offer tools to help Americans make informed choices about their health. At the same time, politicians, advocates, and members of the media all have different interpretations on how and if it will negatively or positively impact the population of Americans with special needs and their families. Who is right? What is right? Amidst this ongoing public conversation, it is critical that all individuals who depend upon special health care services, be they mental, physical, or developmental, learn all they can so they know what they may gain or lose in the implementation of this emerging program. While the implementation of the ACA might be confusing or intimidating, it's also a chance for you to empower yourself through knowledge!

This Focus is dedicated to providing you with a few tips on how to better understand the implications of the ACA for the services and treatments you currently receive, and preparing you for future choices regarding your mental health by sharing a number of resources that provide reliable information.



Tips



Let's look at some suggestions to help you navigate this maze and locate answers that are as individualized as the care you receive.

- ✓ Do NOT leave interpretation of the law and its potential impact on you and your services to the media or politicians. It is critical that you research, understand, and question available services, coming changes, and the law's impact on your ability to access necessary services and treatments.
- ✓ Do NOT believe everything that you hear. No one knows your needs the way that you do. It is critical that you look at the services you have and contact the correct agencies, programs, and organizations that know and understand the ACA and ask them!
- ✓ Be specific and keep track of information you receive.
- ✓ If you receive different answers, call back and ask for clarification, and require that they reference the new law that governs the provision.
- ✓ States have begun to determine their level of compliance with the law. Some of them continue to register lawsuits and indicate that there are certain components of the law that they will not comply with. Research how your state will implement the ACA.
- ✓ Do everything necessary, even writing the President and other policy makers, to help them understand the implications of this law and how they can improve the health care system to help you even more.

Resources

The Health Care Law & You: This site offers you an opportunity to examine all components of the law and read the original law that was passed in 2010. It features sections that show the implementation timeline, key features, and videos for special populations explaining their rights. This site shares information about how the law affects you. <http://www.healthcare.gov/law/index.html>

Health Care and You: The Health Care and You Coalition's goal is to provide the public with easy-to-understand information about the health care law. HealthCareandYou.org is a place where individuals, families, small business owners and health care professionals can turn for help in understanding the law and how it impacts them. The site includes basic information regarding what the Affordable Care is and what it means to individuals. The site also includes a timeline and specific information regarding each state. <http://www.healthcareandyou.org/about/>

Health Reform.Gov: Affordable Care Act Patients' Bill of Rights Fact sheet. This fact sheet gives a basic and easy to understand synopsis of the rights afforded patients under the ACA. http://healthreform.gov/newsroom/new_patients_bill_of_rights.html

Disability.Gov: Fact Sheet on Affordable Care Act & Americans with Disabilities. This fact sheet from HealthCare.gov describes what the Affordable Care Act means for Americans with disabilities. <https://www.disability.gov/viewResource?id=13765609>

AAPD: Health Reform and People with Disabilities. This site examines and discusses the components of the ACA that will impact persons with disabilities. <http://www.aapd.com/resources/fact-sheets/health-reform-people-with-disabilities.html>

PsychCentral: What the Affordable Care Act Means to Mental Health. This brief paper shares how the ACA will impact persons with mental illness. <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2012/06/29/what-the-affordable-care-act-means-to-mental-health/>

SAMHSA HealthReform: SAMHSA offers an overview of the Affordable Care Act and a brief discussion regarding the implications of the law on persons with mental illness. http://www.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsletter/Volume_18_Number_3/AffordableHealthCareAct.aspx

Families USA: Don't be confused by the name . . . this is an organization that is dedicated to the achievement of high-quality, affordable health care for all Americans. Working at the national, state, and community levels, Families USA manages a grassroots advocates' network of organizations and individuals working for the consumer perspective in national and state health policy debates, distributes timely information and mobilizes people for action when appropriate, acts as a watchdog over government actions affecting health care, alerts consumers to changes and helps them have a say in the development of policy, and provides resources, linkages, training, and marketing to assist Americans in better understanding changes in health care policy. <http://www.familiesusa.org/>

Health Law Guide: This web based guide will help you find resources tailored to your needs, whether it's about Medicare, health insurance coverage for you or your family, or public programs that may work for you. It offers multiple resources, links, and information related to the ACA. <http://healthlawguide.aarp.org/>

