

This article is a redacted version of a Community Catalyst article published in June 2014.

CAASTLC Takes Major Role With the Affordable Care Act In St. Louis County and City

The problems with the enrollment web site made the final weeks of the Open Enrollment period crucial to show that citizens were benefitting from the Affordable Care Act. Leading into the final weeks, community organizations in Missouri coordinated a single day of enrollment events across the state, each with a little local flavor. Nearly 50 events took place on March 8, 2014 as part of the Cover More Missouri day of enrollment, reaching hundreds of people with information and personal enrollment assistance community by community.

This success was not a foregone conclusion because of the negativity, through politics, associated now with the Affordable Care Act. Like some other states, the Missouri State legislature refused to establish its own state enrollment program to help its citizens gain health insurance through the Affordable Care Act. Also like some other states, the Missouri legislature refused to accept federal funds to expand Medicaid to cover people making over 18% of poverty. This created a gap for people too poor to qualify for the Affordable Care Act but making too much money to receive Medicaid. Unlike any other state, Missouri passed a referendum which made it illegal for the Governor's office or any state department to assist with implementation of the Affordable Care Act. An online web site to enroll eligible uninsured households was left to the federal enrollment program, called the Marketplace. The primary resource to help fund and support the process in Missouri was through the Missouri Foundation for Health. It funded organizations throughout most of the state including the Community Action Agency of St. Louis County (CAASTLC) to help educate and enroll people. CAASTLC not only took responsibility to enroll people in St. Louis County but also coordinated enrolment efforts of over 20 organizations both in the City and County.

"Grassroots organizations really made the difference," Doug Eller, Resource Development Coordinator at CAASTLC said. "The events on March 8 met the needs of what was happening in Missouri and it was either us or no one." CAASTLC held one of the 47 events organized across the state on March 8—it was a high-energy health fair in Berkeley. Held at the city's brand new municipal building, the fair included health screenings, housing resources, Zumba demonstrations, a radio personality from a local hip hop station and Marketplace enrollment assistance. Individuals and families could meet privately with an enrollment counselor or use a computer to complete the enrollment application with a counselor available to help as needed. The event in Berkeley reached 120 people, and Eller said people were contacting their offices for weeks after the event as a result of the thousands of postcards delivered to households in the region. In the St. Louis area, and other enrollment hubs around the state,

partners pooled resources to pay for local event promotion.

“The key was to have one clear message to get people to hear more about the ACA, but also to enroll people on the spot,” Eller said. It took close coordination within enrollment hubs and statewide. “We were well organized and had great partnerships,” he added.

Local publicity was amplified by St. Louis Region Partners pooling funds to broadcast area events on local radio about March 8 enrollment activities. With assistance by Kathi Lucas Johnson, CAASTLC Media Director, radio spots also promoted CAASTLC’s event. CAASTLC’s Certified Application Counselors reflected on the success of their efforts to assist People to gain health insurance, “The dedication and drive that we have is generated because we see that it’s bettering people’s lives.”