



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
February 2, 2014

FOR FURTHER INFO., CONTACT:
Bob Cohen, (518) 265-6183

**CONSUMER GROUPS SAY EXECUTIVE BUDGET
KEEPS STATE EFFORTS TO EXPAND HEALTH COVERAGE ON TRACK**

ALBANY, NY -- Health Care For All New York (HCFANY), a leading consumer coalition, said in testimony submitted today to the Legislature's fiscal committees that the Executive Budget puts New York on track to continue reducing the number of uninsured. At the same time, HCFANY is proposing changes to more fully meet the needs of consumers to understand and resolve problems with their health plans and to cover some New Yorkers that have been left out of the coverage provisions in the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

"The Executive Budget commendably keeps New York's efforts to continue expanding health coverage on track," said Elisabeth Benjamin, Vice-President, Health Initiatives at the Community Service Society. "The Governor's proposal for a broad-based insurance financing mechanism for NY State of Health, the State's highly successful insurance marketplace, will ensure Marketplace enrollees won't disproportionately bear the burden of the state's coverage expansions. And we're happy to see that the budget provides funding for the state to administer the Basic Health Program, which will generate \$300 million in state savings while expanding coverage to thousands of New Yorkers."

The new Basic Health Program, established as part of last year's budget agreement, will provide low-cost insurance coverage to people just above the Medicaid level - up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level - starting in 2016. Under the ACA, state marketplaces like NY State of Health must be self-sustaining starting this year.

HCFANY praised the budget proposal for providing \$2.5 million in funding to support Community Health Advocates (CHA), while asking the Legislature to increase its funding to \$5 million. "Most of the 1.6 million people that have received coverage through NY State of Health have never had health coverage before," said Bob Cohen, Policy Director of Citizen Action of New York. "Community Health Advocates helps consumers use their coverage effectively, by giving them advice on such issues as bill disputes and finding appropriate providers to meet their medical needs. The additional \$2.5 million we're asking for will restore CHA to the funding level it had several years ago, expand the number of communities CHA serves, and allow the program's overburdened toll-free hotline to keep up with consumer demand."

"While we are happy the state is working to establish a Basic Health Program, we need to ensure that the program is available to as many New Yorkers as possible," said Claudia Calhoun, Health Advocacy Senior Specialist at the New York Immigration Coalition. "New York should use state funds to cover all immigrants who are legal residents under the PRUCOL standard and are ineligible for federal funding under the Basic Health Program. This is a matter of basic fairness and consistent with the Court of Appeal's Aliessa decision. We also urge the state to explore mechanisms by which ALL immigrants will be covered, including those who are undocumented." (PRUCOL stands for "Permanently Residing Under Color of Law.")

HCFANY is also asking the Legislature to require all plans to offer an option for out-of-network coverage, as is available in virtually all other states that have established state exchanges under the ACA. HCFANY is a statewide coalition of over 170 organizations dedicated to quality, affordable coverage for all New Yorkers.

###