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Advocates Urge State Leaders to Keep Moving Forward on Providing Health Coverage to All New Yorkers

Consumer Coalition Calls for Funding for the State's Health Insurance Marketplace, the Basic Health Program, and Consumer Assistance in Final Budget Deal

Albany -- Health Care for New York (HCFANY), a statewide consumer health advocacy coalition of over 170 organizations, urged the Legislature and the Governor to continue to build a strong health insurance system and to take steps to expand the affordability of health coverage in the final 2015-16 budget agreement.

"We are quite surprised to see that the Senate does not provide funding for NY State of Health, the state's new, highly successful health insurance marketplace," said Mark Hannay, Director of Metro New York Health Care for All Campaign. "Over two million New Yorkers, most of whom were uninsured, have enrolled in affordable coverage through the Marketplace since it opened for business in the Fall of 2013, far exceeding predictions. The overwhelming majority are satisfied with their coverage, according to a survey done last year. We hope that the Governor and Assembly will convince the Senate to fund our state's program to provide good health insurance to otherwise uninsured New Yorkers."

"We also need to provide robust funding for the now much-in-demand Community Health Advocates consumer assistance program," said Bob Cohen, Policy Director of Citizen Action of New York. "Newly-insured New Yorkers need help learning how to use their coverage, and troubleshooting any problems they may have with it."

The Senate budget bill repeals the Basic Health Program established by the Legislature last year. "The final budget agreement should include funding to allow the Department of Health to move forward to establish a new Basic Health Program," said Andrew Leonard, Senior Health Policy Associate with the Children's Defense Fund of New York. "The Senate bill would deny very low-cost insurance coverage to low-income working families who are struggling to get by."

HCFANY is also supporting measures in the final budget agreement to:

- strengthen accountability for indigent care funds provided to hospitals.
- maintain the longstanding right of "spousal/parental refusal" when qualifying for long-term care services under Medicaid. (Governor Cuomo proposes to eliminate it.)
- maintain "prescriber prevails" rights in fee-for-service Medicaid, in which coverage is provided for a particular drug therapy not listed on the state's preferred drug list if, in a doctor's professional judgment, the patient needs it. (Governor Cuomo proposes to eliminate it.)
- maintain the right to temporary "immediate needs Medicaid" for uninsured patients urgently needing medical services, while an official determination of Medicaid eligibility is pending. (Governor Cuomo proposes to end this program.)