



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **AFRICAN-AMERICANS MORE LIKELY TO BE DISENROLLED FROM MEDICAID**

### *Two-Year Enrollment Periods and Targeted Initiatives to Combat Public Health Insurance “Churn” Are Recommended*

**May 27, 2009 (New York, NY)** – African-Americans are more likely to lose their Medicaid managed care coverage compared with other racial/ethnic groups in New York State, according to a new study released today by the Community Service Society of New York with support from the New York State Health Foundation (NYSHealth). More than 40 percent of all enrollees in New York’s public health insurance programs lose their coverage each year although many remain eligible. The analysis of Medicaid health plan data reveals that among racial/ethnic groups, African-Americans have the lowest annual retention rates (59 percent) while Asian/Pacific Islanders have the highest retention rates (65 percent).

“This report shows that public insurance is a great equalizer for low-income racial and ethnic minorities,” said David R. Jones, president and CEO of the Community Service Society of New York. “But it also shows the unacceptable reality that African-American beneficiaries are more likely than others to lose public insurance coverage each year. New York State policymakers should immediately adopt the practical steps we’ve identified that will address the systemic reasons for this disparity in public insurance retention.”

The report, “Promoting Equity & Coverage in New York’s Public Insurance Programs,” also finds that New York’s public health insurance programs have had an equalizing effect on coverage rates among low-income racial and ethnic groups. For New Yorkers with incomes below 150 percent of the federal poverty level (approximately \$27,465 for a family of three), the percentages that are uninsured are similar among Whites (31 percent), African-Americans (30 percent), Latinos (34 percent), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (33 percent). Once individuals are insured and receive care, other studies reveal that disparities in preventive services and other types of care are significantly reduced.

“Our public insurance programs, which currently serve 4.5 million New Yorkers, have the potential to provide health care equality for all of our state’s residents,” said James R. Knickman, president and CEO of NYSHealth. “To reach that potential, we must ensure that all eligible New Yorkers, regardless of race or ethnicity, get signed up for insurance and maintain it so long as they remain eligible.”

“Improving retention in our state’s public health insurance plans is within our grasp. It’s time for us to solve this problem and provide New Yorkers with the coverage they need to stay healthy,” said Elisabeth Benjamin, Director of Healthcare Restructuring Initiatives at CSS and lead author of the study.

Health plans varied widely in their retention rates. For all races and ethnicities, the best performing plan retained 74 percent of its members while the lowest retention rate for a plan was 47 percent. Larger plans had higher retention rates than smaller plans. Enrollees in New York City had higher retention rates than those in other areas of the state.

“New York has taken the first step towards eradicating racial and ethnic disparities in insurance coverage and health outcomes for people at the lowest end of the income scale,” said David Sandman, Senior Vice President of NYSHHealth. “The next step is to level the playing field in terms of helping all people to keep their coverage.”

The report recommends that the state continue its efforts to streamline and improve the renewal process. In particular, it recommends that New York seek a waiver from the federal government in order to offer two years of continuous public insurance enrollment and help reduce racial disparities in health insurance coverage. It also recommends that the state work closely with Medicaid managed care plans to review their retention rates for different races/ethnicities and to make such information publicly available.

Currently, some 4.5 million New Yorkers rely on the state’s public health insurance programs. Improving how these safety net programs function is essential to eradicating the racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes prevalent throughout the state. This study is part of NYSHHealth’s broader initiative to expand health insurance coverage throughout the state. NYSHHealth has committed \$20 million in grant funding to reduce the number of uninsured New Yorkers.

To obtain a copy of the report, please click on link:

<http://www.cssny.org/userimages/downloads/Promoting%20Equity%20&%20Coverage%20Second%20Report%20May%202009.pdf>

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*For 160 years, the Community Service Society of New York has been the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers and continues to advocate for the economic security of the working poor in the nation’s largest city.*

*The New York State Health Foundation is a private Foundation dedicated to improving the health of all New Yorkers. NYSHHealth has a three-part mission: expanding health insurance coverage, increasing access to high-quality health care services, and improving public and community health by educating New Yorkers about health issues and empowering communities to address them.*