Bucknell
UNIVERSITY

Affordable Care Act Pilot Program

Policy Education, Mobilization, & Evaluation

The Affordable Care Act
Policy Education, Mobilization, & Evaluation
A Pilot Program at Bucknell University

The Problem

The Affordable Care Act continues to receive national attention. Passing the Act proved controversial, and implementation wrought with problems. Although the Act is law, many do not fully understand all the implications and provisions in the Act. Furthermore, the process of enrolling for healthcare via the health exchange has been problematic to date and received extensive negative press further negatively influencing public opinion. This is a particular concern as the region we are located in, rural Central Pennsylvania, has one of the highest proportions of un- and under insured individuals in the state. Furthermore, Pennsylvania has done very little to prepare itself or its citizens for the rollout of this program.

As such, we are in a region with remarkable health care needs, where access to information about the ACA is limited, and infrastructure for actually enrolling individuals nearly non-existent. Regardless of the politics around this controversial Act, this proposal targets individuals who are in need of affordable care, but lack the resources or knowledge to get it.

This proposed Affordable Care Act Pilot Program, based at Bucknell University, aims to address these issues of knowledge, access, and infrastructure regarding the health exchanges by developing and mobilizing a program which can be implemented in the coming months, first as a pilot program, then expanded across a relatively wide area of central Pennsylvania.

The ACA Pilot Program at Bucknell University intends to take the lead on this initiative by developing a strategic action plan, mobilizing community efforts, and conducting research to understand a variety of issues around ACA and public policy implementation.

Background & Beginnings

In August of 2013, Carl Milofsky, Professor of Sociology at Bucknell University, interviewed Bette Gray, the Executive Director of the Columbia County Volunteers in Medicine. Bette identified access to health care as one of the major health challenges of the central Pennsylvania region.

Bette soon positioned her Federally Qualified Health Clinic (FQHC) clinic to serve as a resource for local residents looking to enroll in the health exchange. She applied to have her organization contractually approved to register and train Certified Application Counselors. Certified Application Counselors must attend trainings to learn about ACA and the guidelines and parameters volunteers must abide by in order to serve in this role. When her application was approved, her clinic became the *only* registered agency in a seven county area of Central Pennsylvania.

She reached out to Carl Milofsky, Professor of Sociology and Co-Director of the Bucknell University *Field Research Teaching Lab* and Brandn Green, Director of the *Place Studies Initiative,* also at Bucknell University, to inquire about a possible collaboration. The group met for coffee and expanded during the next few weeks as they began to anticipate that no other organizations within the large geographic region of central Pennsylvania would be prepared to assist individuals with education and enrollment as the October 1 launch date for ACA neared.

Subsequently, Carl and Brandn completed a one-day training on the ACA held by the Pennsylvania Health Access Network (PHAN) and were certified by PHAN to provide public information PowerPoint lectures on the ACA. They also went through the five-hour training

class, and passed the exam to become approved Certified Assistance Counselors. They are now ready to assist citizens in signing up on the health exchange.

The group continued to meet every week, slowly adding fellow concerned citizens like Joel Turrel (an insurance agent), John Messer, a "street" sociologist and community consultant, Sharon Larson (a division head of Behavioral Health at the NIH), AUTHOR (Bucknell University), Eric Martin (Assistant Professor of Management at Bucknell University), and Bucknell University management students (Grace Dolan, Emily Wheeler, and Zachary Crowley). These meetings led to three collectively identified project needs: education and community outreach, enrollment supporting infrastructure, and research and evaluation. Nine more students joined the group to run these individual project groups and are also currently going through the training to become Certified Assistance Counselors.

NEEDS

Education

Educational needs about the ACA are robust, and there is a dearth of information about the ACA within central Pennsylvania. Carl, John Messer and Brandn began giving talks at public locations throughout the region. Sessions were completed at Bucknell, and in a variety of towns in central Pennsylvania. John partnered with three students from Bucknell to begin a grassroots informational campaign to learn from citizens the best way to reach out to them. These interviews are serving as initial assessment of the various target populations and their specific needs with respect to the ACA. This work will enable us to better develop and distribute fliers and basic information to specific population groups that may not use the Internet as their primary information source. However, much more needs to be done to get the word out!

With the help of three students, Susan Warner-Mills from the Bucknell *Field Research Teaching Lab* has begun to contact local human services organizations in an attempt to identify opportunities for the team to learn more about sub groups of the population and their needs, and understand current points of contact and develop a calendar for presentations about ACA. One major task will be an event at Bucknell bringing together leaders of the service providers we identify to facilitate conversations about the experiences they have had with ACA and to strategize about how to enable increased enrollment before the March 31 deadline.

Finally, due to the partnership with Bette, we have access to the CMS certified application counselor (CAC) training program. We have begun to hold training events for students (eight attended our first session) and local service providers, caseworkers, and volunteer supporters (two attended our first session). We intend to generate a group of certified local volunteers and professionals who can assist citizens to receive advice and enrollment support. We have begun to schedule office hours in local agency settings where they have large numbers of clients who want to sign up for Medicaid or health insurance through the Insurance Exchange.

Enrollment Supporting Infrastructure

We have identified three basic infrastructure needs: a volunteer work group, locations for providing Internet access and application counseling, and a multipurpose website; we are developing a web tool with the Community Platform program of the Urban Institute (http://nccsweb.urban.org/susquehanna.php) that will disseminate information and act as a coordinating tool for our various groups. To date, we have formed a group of 15 students from Bucknell working on a wide variety of issues in relation to the pilot project. As the project develops, staff will be trained as CACs, and will directly assist citizens in signing up on the

health exchange through community field stations identified via the *Field Research Teaching Lab.*

Also, we intend to partner with local hospitals, the United Ways in the region, other Federally Qualified Health Centers in the area, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania extension offices to provide locations for enrollment, and to assist in advertising enrollment support opportunities. In addition, we anticipate that we will identify certified insurance agents throughout the region who can be used as consultants for those individuals in need of more technical information than can be expected from an application counselor.

Evaluation

Evaluation and research is a major component of the pilot program, and we anticipate generating both practical and scholarly findings. We plan to develop and distribute administrative data forms to our Certified Application Counselor locations. This allows counselors to maintain communication with clients and it will allow the administrative organization connected to the Volunteers in Medicine Clinic to collect data on the types of individuals who seek assistance through in-person helpers.

The major research question for this effort is, "*Why did the enrollee decide to use in-person support rather than the website or phone number*?"

We will complete two other studies. One involves a semi-structured, personal history interview study of individuals we helped register for the Affordable Care Act. We will base this study design on a similar, but incomplete, health life history study that collects data on personal health events, on respondents' work histories and experiences living at income levels close to the Federal Poverty Line, and their experiences accessing the health care system.

The second study is an organizational case study report describing our efforts to set up a volunteer student and citizen movement focused on disseminating information about the Affordable Care Act. One aspect of this case study will be a description of how we have organized a student-centered participatory action research project. This is particularly important because of the mission of the Field Research Teaching Lab and our effort to use this platform effectively on a wide range of topics across the University. A second aspect will be a description of the challenges rural communities face in accessing the services of the Affordable Care Act. A third part will describe methods we discover for reaching out and working with the low income, rural population in our area. For example, we anticipate problems with the computer-centered methodology of the federal act for a population that is marginally literate and that does not routinely work on computers. We also anticipate that some citizens in our area are likely to be suspicious about the intrusive data collection and standardized program structure of the Affordable Care Act. The case study will describe strategies we develop in the field to overcome reluctance among members of the local population

Finally, we want to collect quantitative data as a way to understand the health insurance and health care context of the ACA in central Pennsylvania. The study would include a survey of human services agencies in the region about the knowledge they have of the ACA, the infrastructure they have to support ACA enrollment, and their needs to deliver effective programming. It also would collect data from citizens about their access to services, their history of access to health insurance, and their involvement in local communities, associations, and helping networks,

Primary Affiliates of the Pilot Program at Bucknell University

AUTHOR (*SCRA Member*)
Associate Professor
Bucknell University

Carl Milofsky, Ph.D.
Professor of Sociology
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Bucknell University

Brandn Green, Ph.D.
Director of the Place Studies Initiative
Bucknell University

Eric Martin, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Management
School of Management
Bucknell University

Bucknell University Student Strategic Advisors
Grace Dolan
Emily Wheeler
Zachary Crowley

ACA Model

Brought by the Bucknell Field Research Teaching Lab (FRTL) and the Place Studies Initiative

Educating

1. Define proper segments in the region
   a. Elderly
   b. Businesses
   c. Underinsured
   d. Uninsured

2. Q&A information sessions for the Bucknell community
   a. Advertise on the message center, and to specific organizations on campus

3. Establish a website and other forms of media
   a. Create enrollment calendar
   b. Post information in other community calendars

4. Train Certified Application Counselors
   a. Host three 2 hour sessions for students and other interested community members to complete Centers for Medicaid Services Training (CMS)

5. Identify locations for speaking events and coordinate with relevant actors to arrange events where certified presenters will explain the Affordable Care Act to the public in Union, Snyder, Montour, Northumberland, and Columbia Counties.

Enrolling

1. Establish points of contact for each segment
    a. Health Clinic Leaders
    b. Organization Heads
    c. Local, culturally relevant, community groups

2. Coordinate a schedule for a pilot group of certified application counselors
    a. Two sessions per week
    b. Utilize local libraries and community spaces
    c. Targeted and strategic advertising required

3. Start to enable the public to enroll in insurance through a network of Certified Application Counselors in the region

Evaluating

1. Assess progress in study counties by the number of people signed up to be certified application counselors as well as the number of people assisted with the marketplace signups

2. Reconvene as a group in January and develop new strategies for the spring semester as needed

3. If successful, produce documents which explain our process so that other universities and locations can apply our awareness and training process in other rural and underserved locales

REQUESTED BUDGET

Budget Item	Amount	Source(s)
Student Project Managers	$2000	Place Studies: $500 **SCRA:** $1500
Student (CAC) Pay	$1000	**SCRA**: $1000
Advertising about ACA and CAC enrollment support opportunities	$2000	Blue Cross & Blue Shield Grant: $1000 **SCRA**: $1000
Local Travel for CACs, Educational Events, and Health Interviews	$1500	ASA Community Research Grant: $500 **SCRA:** $1000
Travel Expenses for Students to attend Conferences	$1500	Place Studies: $1000 **SCRA**: $500
Travel Expenses for Faculty to attend Conferences	$5000	School of Management: $3500 Place Studies: $500 Sociology Department: $1000
		Total Budget: $13,000 **Total SRCA Grant Request: $5000**

Budget Narrative

We have been actively working to build a university-community collaborative since late August of 2013 and have been able to identify a range of financial support mechanisms for our work. The SCRA grant opportunity provides us with the ability to enhance the profile and reach of the project in both our region and in the scholarly community. Our narrative explains the ways that we arrived at the SCRA share of each expense category.

Our current student team includes two modes of student involvement – student managers, and students certified application counselors (CACs). The budget reflects the different incentives these populations need for meaningful involvement as we transition into the spring semester. The student managers will be paid $8.50/hr., will work for 5 hours per week, and will work for 15 weeks of work. Through our cross departmental partnerships we have been able to identify and hire three management students for the rest of the fall semester. The SCRA request allows us to hire these students, who have expertise in the ACA, and who have expressed interest in continued involvement next semester, without having to pull resources (from other research internships) from the Place Studies Initiative Budget at Bucknell. The student CACs are volunteers and have been involved with the project because they have personalized interests in healthcare access. We would like to be able to provide them with a $100 bonus for the work they have been doing as volunteers to demonstrate, in a financial way, that we could not have done this work without their efforts.

The lack of advertising opportunities for receiving support by Certified Application Counselors in the central Pennsylvania region is staggering. We plan to extensively advertise enrollment support opportunities our students can offer. It is also our intention to develop a network of additional supporters, specifically insurance agents who have been certified by CMS, so students can connect individuals whom they are assisting that have more complex questions the students are unable to answer. In addition, we will be drawing upon the language skills of Bucknell students to provide opportunities to Spanish speaking members of the region. As far as we can tell, no other local organization has the capacity and financial ability to provide this service.

Our collaborative research is challenged by being located in a geographically dispersed rural region lacking public transportation. Our main community partner, The Free Clinic in Berwick, is located 35 miles from the Bucknell campus. We expect to be providing CACs in a 5-county region that spans roughly 60 miles, with our university being located in the center. If we are able to reimburse our volunteer students for the mileage they would otherwise be absorbing, it is realistic for us to place a CAC in the less populated regions of these counties that are unlikely to be offering locations for enrollment assistance. Our travel estimate includes reimbursement for mileage [11 weeks of enrollment support from 1/13 (start of spring semester) to 3/31 (enrollment period concludes) at 2 trips per week estimated at 50 total miles per trip @ $.55 per mile = $605.00] and $400 for students and faculty to have the ability to have a few meals reimbursed over the course of the semester of frequent travel.

We view this project as one that connects students from different majors and colleges within Bucknell to the local community and to the scholarly community that is engaged with

social issues, public policy, applied research, and non-profit scholarship. These are areas of expertise represented by the Faculty involved with this project. Being able to supplement the financial resources provided to us by the University for conference attendance with monies from the SCRA will enable us to give undergraduate students professional development experiences with attending conferences and presenting both the architecture of this community-university partnership and the research findings generated by our work.

FAQs

How does the proposal…..

Address a current public policy issue of importance to the community of interest?

The ACA is the most current public policy issue in America, and there is immediate need in relation to policy education, implementation, and evaluation.

Connect to community psychology (CP)?

The Bucknell ACA Pilot Program is a community action project that will bring identifiable change to central Pennsylvania. The project involves a multi-stakeholder approach, within an ecological analysis framework, to enact social change.

Address a policy area where CP has a contribution to make?

This project is well suited for CP because it is based on tenets of the field (i.e., action research, and social impact).

Demonstrate the potential to establish or build upon relationships with other organizations and their resources?

The project will stimulate direct action between Bucknell University with community organizations, and the citizens of central Pennsylvania. The project will result in an action network that can be used in public policy projects in the future.

Demonstrate potential to have a successful impact?

Given the expertise and resources at Bucknell University, and partnership organizations in the community, the project is very likely to succeed in educating citizens about the ACA, and helping to get folks signed up in the exchange. Also, as the project rolls-out, additional universities will likely join which will increase the potential for impact in the region.

Increase capacity of communities/groups, to influence public policy?

As noted earlier, the project will stimulate direct action between Bucknell University with community organizations, and the citizens of central Pennsylvania. The action network will be used in regional public policy projects in the future.

Increase capacity of SCRA, to influence public policy?

Because of the involvement of AUTHOR, a SCRA member, SCRA will be represented in this community change effort.   In addition, AUTHOR is working to assist community action in a variety of ways at Bucknell (e.g., through institutes on campus), and in the region, which will bring an additional presence of SCRA to central Pennsylvania.   Also, as the project rolls-out, AUTHOR will attempt to involve a faculty member at a local University (who is a SCRA member) to involve his students to bring capacity to this project and future projects.

Articulate an appropriate budget that effectively supports the proposed activities and ensures accountability of expenditures?

We have a variety of budgetary needs, but the budget we have proposed will target the requested $5,000 in ways that effectively use the funds.

Includes a plan for dissemination of results or outcome, such as including, but not limited to, publication in AJCP or TCP, Biennial and/or APA Conference presentations or dissemination to other relevant publications and stakeholders?

AUTHOR (and other project members) will present information about this project, and findings from the research to the SCRA community.   AUTHOR has widely published in the field of community psychology, and will assist the group in determining appropriate venues for the public presentation.