

Healthy SF phases out as Obamacare begins

Now feds will pick up the tab

By MARK HEDIN

MAYBE ALL GOOD THINGS do come to an end, but in San Francisco, where Healthy SF since 2007 has enabled previously uninsured residents to get affordable health care but is now phasing out because of Obamacare, the Department of Public Health is making the transition as smooth as possible.

The new options under the Affordable Care Act may be better, DPH Communications Director Rachael Kagan told The Extra, but DPH will continue to keep Healthy SF available through the end of this year for those who aren't ready to make the change. Had the Health Commission not endorsed the extension, Kagan said, Healthy SF would have been off the table for anyone eligible for Covered California or Medi-Cal as of the end of March.

Obamacare got off to a well-publicized rocky start late last year, with backlogs in the enrollment process, confusion with the new system and questions about its options' price, scope and availability. So at least for another six months, Healthy SF will remain open for business.

A key feature of Obamacare is the expansion of the Medicaid system. Medicaid, administered by California as Medi-Cal, is now available to anyone whose income falls below 138% of the federal poverty level, currently \$16,105 for a single person, \$21,707 for a family of two and \$32,913 for a family of four.

With the 2010 passage of the Af-

fordable Care Act, DPH began identifying clients who would be eligible under the expanded Medi-Cal. This January, when that program became available, DPH seamlessly transitioned 15,046 people who qualified into Medi-Cal, with the federal government ultimately picking up the tab for their care, easing the city's financial burden.

"They didn't have to do a thing," Kagan said of the 15,046 new Medi-Cal enrollees.

Because eligibility for Healthy SF like Medi-Cal, is based on income, "we have income information on members," Kagan said. So, beginning in 2011, DPH began looking at "who of this group is going to be eligible for Medi-Cal" when it becomes available and enrolled them in a program, SFPATH, that transitioned them into Medi-Cal.

"If we didn't have them grouped, we would have had this enormous task," she said, "but instead we were able to just switch them into Medi-Cal, a much better program for any person who could be eligible."

Healthy SF, unlike Medi-Cal, covers its enrollees only for medical expenses incurred within San Francisco. Medi-Cal also includes dental care and has an expanded network of eligible pharmacies for members to use. Also, whereas Healthy SF only allows members one opportunity per year to change their primary care providers, Medi-Cal clients have that option every month.

Individuals and employers who opted to create health care savings accounts through Healthy SF, howev-

er, have experienced a wider range of available services.

Healthy SF's enrollment as of early June stood at 30,843, Kagan told The Extra, down from its January 2011 peak of 57,436.

That drop in enrollment is nearly twice the 15,000 rolled over to Medi-Cal. Kagan said some may have been hired at jobs that provide insurance, others might have become eligible for Medi-Cal subsequent to the expiration of the SFPATH program in January due to decreased income, and probably more than a few left town.

Healthy SF will continue to be there, though, for those who need it. For instance, not everyone is eligible for Obamacare. Some exceptions: Undocumented people, those who have

religious exemptions, members of sovereign American Indian groups and the incarcerated. DPH will continue to offer Healthy SF to those people.

In addition, there's the group Kagan referred to as "the disorganized" who are unable to make the transition, whether due to homelessness, mental health issues, missed deadlines or are recent arrivals to San Francisco.

In fiscal year 2012-13, the most recent figures available, Kagan said, Healthy SF cost the city approximately \$97 million.

That's the balance of the program's cost after revenue from members, employers and grants is factored in, Kagan said, and the city expects that figure to decrease as Healthy SF clients transition to Medi-Cal. ■

3 seats on citizens panel vacant

By MARK HEDIN

THREE OF THE 11 seats on the Citizens Advisory Committee are vacant.

Tim Ho of the city administrator's office confirmed that Jeff Kositsky, whose seat is reserved for someone with expertise on homelessness, transitional age youth or supportive housing, resigned after the June meeting.

Kositsky, executive director of Hamilton Family Services, at his last appearance on the CAC successfully moved that Market Street for the Masses be granted a permanent spot on the committee's agenda.

The Extra was unable to reach Kositsky for comment at press time.

Nella Corpuz Manuel, a member of the CAC since its inception in 2012, told The Extra she resigned in March from her seat reserved for someone with expertise on seniors or disabled residents in the neighborhood, "be-

cause we weren't doing anything."

She was "just wasting my time" at the CAC, she said. "Makes me mad, makes me angry."

"It's painful," she told The Extra. "I don't want to be considered that I'm not doing anything."

"This is politics and I'm not a politician. They created the CAC so the people will not protest. They should put this tax exemption on the ballot. It's the office of the mayor that has the last say, it's not the CAC. We are not the ones negotiating with the companies; it is not the CAC approving it."

"We did the framework of the CBAs, that's all we did," she said.

The third unfilled seat has been vacant since Mara Blitzer stepped down in November.

Anyone interested in serving on the panel — it's a volunteer position — can contact Alisa Miller, clerk of the supervisors Rules Committee, at 554-4447. ■



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