

# Survey Results Show Medicaid Recipients Do Not Understand New Medicaid Program - Mountain Health Choices

August 27, 2008

In May 2006, West Virginia received approval from the federal government to redesign the state's Medicaid program. The new Medicaid program known as Mountain Health Choices was implemented in three counties, Clay, Upshur, and Lincoln in March 2007 and went statewide in November 2007. The new program offers low income families two different plans - Basic and Enhanced. The Basic Plan reduces access to medical services including prescription drugs and mental health services. The Enhanced Plan does not reduce services and includes additional services such as smoking cessation and nutrition. In order to enroll in the Enhanced Plan, the adult in the household must meet with their *medical home* and sign a *Member Agreement*.

According to the latest numbers available from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, (DHHR) Bureau for Medical Services, 137,959 children and adults are currently enrolled in the Mountain Health Choices Program. This number represents approximately 55 percent of the Medicaid population of children and parents (250,000) that are targeted for enrollment in the Mountain Health Choices Program. The remaining 112,041 Medicaid recipients will have to choose between the Basic and Enhanced Plan on the anniversary date of their enrollment. This process is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

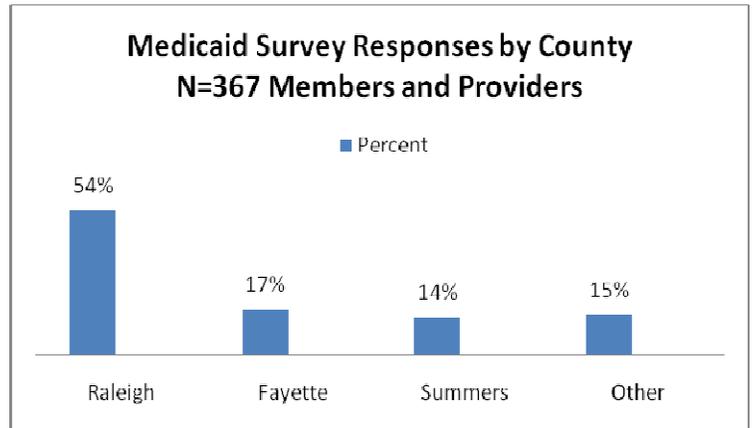
The numbers provided by DHHR do not provide information on how many Medicaid recipients made an active choice in deciding upon Basic or Enhanced. Upon their reenrollment date Medicaid recipients are placed in Basic. If no plan is chosen, the recipient and their children are defaulted into the Basic Plan. According to DHHR, Medicaid recipients are automatically placed in the Basic Plan and remain there unless they complete the enrollment requirements for the Enhanced Plan within 90 days of their eligibility redetermination date.

Direct Action Welfare Group (DAWG) believes that many Medicaid recipients, of which 79% are children, are simply defaulting into the Basic Plan because they do not fully understand the process to enroll in the Enhanced Plan. We further believe this limits a parent's ability to truly have a choice with regard to their family's health care. Because of these concerns, Direct Action Welfare Group conducted a survey of providers and recipients. The survey was made available via our website ([www.wvdawg.org](http://www.wvdawg.org)) and was distributed by DAWG and partnering organizations through mailings, newsletters, and emails.

**Survey results indicate that most Medicaid recipients have received little or no information and are confused about the new program.**

A total of 367 non-duplicate responses were received between February 1, 2008 and August 15, 2008. Of these responses 354 were from current Medicaid recipients and 13 were from health care providers that provide services to Medicaid recipients.

Of the total responses, 54 percent were received from Raleigh County representing 23 percent of all adult Medicaid members enrolled in the county<sup>1</sup>, 17 percent of the responses were received from Fayette County representing 12 percent of the total adults enrolled in the county,<sup>2</sup> and 14 percent were received from Summers County representing 26 percent of the total adults enrolled in the county<sup>3</sup>. The remaining responses were received from Berkeley, Boone, Clay, Gilmer, Grant, Greenbrier, Kanawha, McDowell, Marion, Mercer, Mineral, Mingo, Monongalia, Monroe, Nicholas, Wood, and Wyoming Counties.



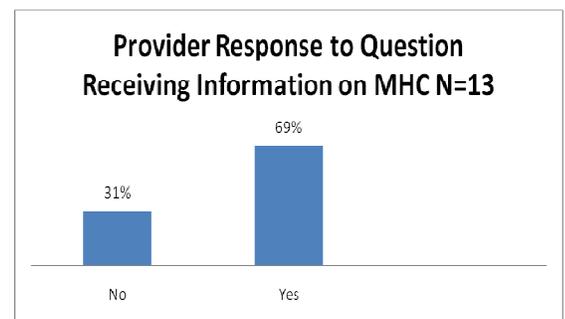
***“The representative had very few answers to questions and provided very limited information”***

*Comments from a Health Care Provider who attended an outreach event*

**Almost one third of health care providers responding to the survey said they had received no information on Mountain Health Choices**

Of the 13 health care providers who responded, six offer general medical services, six mental/behavioral health services and one is a multiple service provider including ob/gyn services.

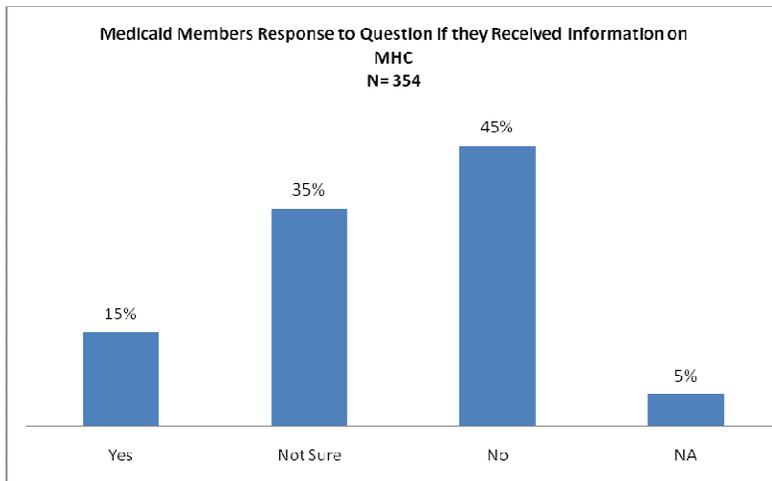
Of the providers responding, 31 percent indicated they had received no information on the Mountain Health Choices program, 69 percent received information in a mailing, from an outreach worker and/or had attended an outreach event. About half (46%) were provided with training in filling out the forms and received information to hand out to their patients.



<sup>1</sup> Total adults enrolled in Mountain Health Choices in Raleigh County as of August 2008 was 855

<sup>2</sup> Total adults enrolled in Mountain Health Choices in Fayette County as of August 2008 was 514

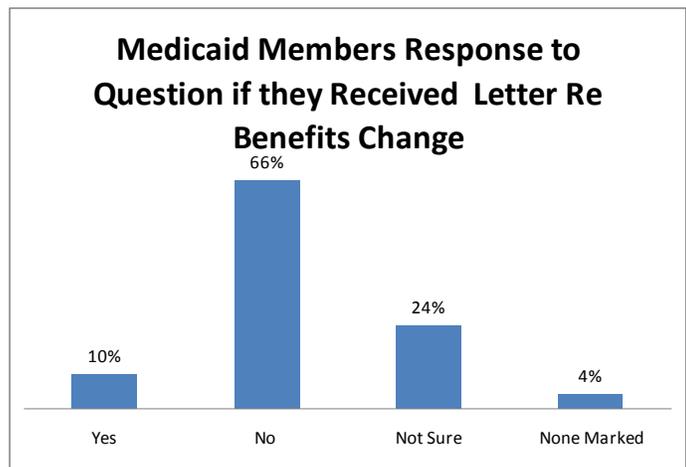
<sup>3</sup> Total adults enrolled in Mountain Health Choices in Summers County as of August 2008 was 195



Of the 354 current Medicaid recipients who submitted surveys, only 15 percent indicated they had received a letter or packet of information from Mountain Health Choices, 35 percent indicated they were not sure if they had received a letter or packet of information, and 45 percent indicated they had not received any information on Mountain Health Choices (MCH).

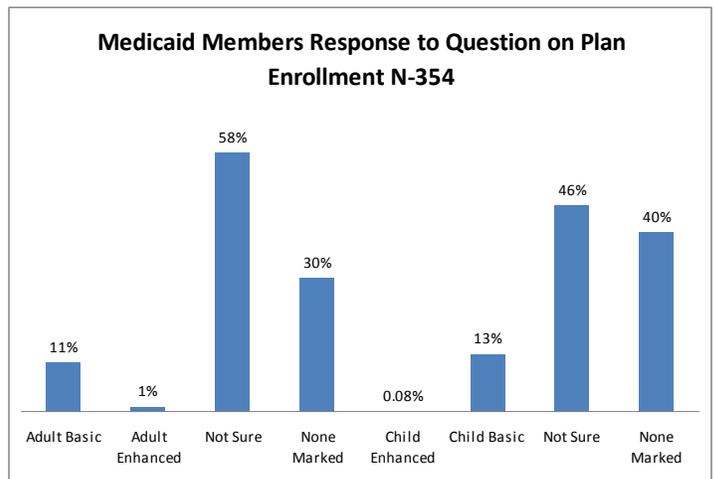
**Only 15 percent of Medicaid recipients indicated they had received information about Mountain Health Choices.**

In responding to the question whether or not they had received a letter regarding benefit changes, 10 percent responded that they had received a letter, 66 percent responded that they had not received a letter and 24 percent were not sure.



**Only 1 percent of adult respondents indicated they were in the enhanced plan. Less than 1 percent of children are in the enhanced plan.**

Of the adults responding, 11 percent indicated they were in the Basic plan, 1 percent indicated they were in the Enhanced plan, and 58 percent indicated they were not sure which plan they were in even though it clearly stated on the survey where to locate the information on the medical card. When asked to indicate which plan their children were in on the survey, 13 percent indicated their children were in Basic, 0.8 percent indicated their children were in Enhanced, and 46 percent were not sure which plan their children were enrolled in.



Direct Action Welfare Group believes that the survey results confirm that people do not adequately understand the Mountain Health Choices Program – a program that radically

affects the lives and health status of thousands of adults and children in West Virginia. More outreach and education must occur to properly inform Medicaid recipients about this new program. Mountain Health Choices is yet another social experiment on the poor done without any input from the people most affected by the program. Direct Action Welfare Group believes that the program needs to be suspended until such time as the problems that exist can be corrected. Short of suspension of the program, we recommend changing the default to Enhanced and allowing families the option to choose the Basic Plan.

**Direct Action Welfare Group recommends that Medicaid Redesign be suspended until problems with enrollment can be addressed.**

**Direct Action Welfare Group Inc.  
PO Box 20079  
Charleston, WV 25362  
304-539-3157  
[www.wvdawg.org](http://www.wvdawg.org)**

**Direct Action Welfare Group Inc. (DAWG)** is a statewide organization comprised of public assistance recipients including Medicaid recipients, low wage workers, and people in poverty.

Direct Action Welfare Group's vision is the end of poverty in West Virginia. In order to make this vision a reality, we advocate with low-income families for economic justice.

Direct Action Welfare Group believes....

- Poor people of West Virginia can stand together as an organized community to fight against discrimination and the suffering of poverty.
- No matter how poor you are you have a voice and rights as a human being.
- Every individual should be treated fairly regardless of race, creed, nationality, income, sexual orientation, religion, gender, age, or educational level.
- Access to services and assistance is a right and not a benefit
- Everyone has the right to a good education including post-secondary education, medical, dental, and vision care, a job at a living wage, affordable childcare, decent housing and adequate food and clothing.
- Every mother should have the option to choose to stay home and care for her children or work.