



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Health, Education, and Human Services Committee
members advocate for the continuation of AHCCCS benefits for Navajos**

PHOENIX – Last Thursday, members from the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee attended the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System Tribal Consultation, which was conducted to clarify to Arizona’s tribal leaders and tribal health entities about the proposed contingency plan known as the 1115 waiver.

Due to the recession, in July 2011 AHCCCS implemented an eligibility freeze that would close enrollment to all individuals until additional funds became available for the AHCCCS Care program, according to the AHCCCS assistant director of intergovernmental affairs Monica Coury,

AHCCCS was also forced to make cuts to several benefits such as emergency dental, podiatry, and wellness visits previously covered by AHCCCS.

Following the benefit cuts and enrollment freeze, AHCCCS submitted a waiver to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which allowed for AHCCCS to reimburse Indian Health Services and 638 facilities for providing uncompensated care to patients, on Dec. 31 this waiver expires.

“The need for such services and benefits is essential. The Navajo health care system is working to provide such services along with preventative measures,” said HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels).

Following the signing of Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer’s health care plan, which expands health coverage up to 133% of the federal poverty level, a group of 36 Arizona legislators working with the Goldwater Institute filed lawsuits against both Governor Brewer and AHCCCS director Tom Betlach, calling the Governor’s plan unconstitutional.

AHCCCS is currently working to submit the proposed of the 1115 waiver to CMS that would allow for the continuation of reimbursements to I.H.S. and 638 health facilities.

The implementation of the 1115 waiver is dependent on the outcome of the lawsuit. A decision in favor of the Goldwater Institute would cause the waiver to take effect.

“This is a complex issue, and I want to be confident moving forward. What remains is a lot of ‘what if’s’ and I’m uncomfortable with those unknowns in our health system,” said Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi).

In an effort to prevent any disruption to benefits, HEHSC members strongly advocated for the approval of the 1115 waiver.

Although AHCCCS representatives remain confident that the lawsuit's outcome will be in their favor, and that Gov. Brewer's health care plan will be sufficient to restore benefits and end the enrollment freeze, the Nation has requested further details to explain such.

The AHCCCS plans to develop a proposal for the 1115 waiver to be submitted to the federal CMS by the end of this week.

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