

The Health Consumer Center

The Health Consumer Center (HCC) is an independent consumer assistance program that helps low income residents of Los Angeles County to obtain quality health care from HMOs and other public and private health care providers. HCC's mission is to ensure that the consumer is aware of, utilizes, and is the beneficiary of all health care programs for which the consumer is eligible. In instances where barriers hinder consumers' ability to receive appropriate health care, HCC steps in to advocate on their behalf. Thus, through HCC's advocacy, community education/outreach, and policy development, HCC is centered around the needs of the consumer.

The Health Consumer Center is managed and operated by Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County (NLS) through a grant from the California Endowment. Neighborhood Legal Services has been assisting the community with legal concerns for over 30 years.

Who is Eligible for Help?

HCC helps low-income individuals and families throughout Los Angeles County. To be eligible for HCC services, a consumer's income can be up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level guidelines. If the consumer's case requires other assistance beyond HCC's scope, HCC will make specific referrals to an appropriate agency that can better assist the client.

What type of individual problems can be referred to HCC?

Any problem a person or family has obtaining needed health care or finding a place to get medical care will receive immediate attention from the HCC Hotline. HCC will assist clients with eligibility issues for Medi-Cal, Healthy Families and other government health programs. In addition, HCC assists consumers who have difficulty obtaining medically necessary health care, referrals and medications from their HMOs. Consumers can also obtain assistance with medical debt collection problems.

HCC Hotline (800) 896 – 3203

The HCC Hotline has been operating since November 1998 and is staffed by ten (10) full-time counselors and one supervising attorney. The Hotline operates four days a week – Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. HCC Counselors are bilingual in Spanish, Armenian, Khmer (Cambodian), and Mandarin, as well as French, Arabic, and Turkish. Consumers requiring other languages can be assisted by HCC through the help of the AT&T Language Line. In 1999, HCC's first full year of operation, the Hotline received more than 25,000 calls (averaging 2,000 calls/month) from people needing assistance in obtaining health care.

HCC Staff Are Available to Assist Community Organizations and Local Groups:

The Health Consumer Center regularly provides education and trainings for clients and agencies about HCC services, existing health care programs, and health care law that might affect the consumer. HCC engages in this outreach through direct presentations to consumers, participation in Health Fairs and Trainings, and the provision of technical assistance to CBO's. Recognizing the geographic, cultural, and linguistic diversity present in Los Angeles County, culturally-sensitive and appropriate outreach is provided, often in collaboration with CBOs with particular knowledge or credibility within these distinct communities. HCC is also involved in community forums to educate CBOs, health care providers and consumers on new immigration rulings that make it safe for immigrants to receive health care.

Some recent HCC cases include:

- A 30 yr old single mother of a 10 yr old child was unable to receive medical benefits because her Medi-Cal card was improperly coded. As a result, the 10 yr old child was not being treated for an ear infection. HCC filed a case complaint with the District Office and the card was recoded. The child saw a physician and received antibiotics for his infection the same day.
- A young couple with 3 children was improperly informed by the County Dept. of Public Social Services that if they had children born after welfare reform, they would lose all public assistance. As a result, the couple failed to apply for Medi-Cal for their 1-1/2 year old child who has not received routine check-ups or immunizations since birth. After calling HCC staff and learning about their rights, the couple has applied for Medi-Cal.