

From: Joan Peters [<mailto:jpeters@bcid.org>]

Sent: Friday, October 24, 2014 2:37 PM

Subject: City Council Health Committee/ACCESS HEALTH NYC

I am writing on behalf of the Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled, Inc. (BCID) to urge the City Council to fund *ACCESS HEALTH NYC*.

BCID is a grassroots, non-residential consumer-controlled resource and advocacy center for people with disabilities. Since 1956, BCID's mission has been to empower people with disabilities by improving the quality of their lives and advocating for equal access to society for people with disabilities. Through our services to more than 1,200 people with disabilities annually and our advocacy for systems change, we help people with disabilities remove the physical, attitudinal and communication barriers that prevent them from accessing the same opportunities as other people. Most of BCID's services are provided without charge.

In order for New York City to fully implement the Affordable Care Act, there must be a mechanism for reaching out to communities marginalized by language, immigration status, disability and other factors. This is especially important in Brooklyn, with its linguistic and cultural diversity. In 2013, there were about 420,000 uninsured people in Brooklyn. About 45% of them speak languages other than English; 28% of them were Spanish speakers.

But language is not the only barrier. Other communities, such as people with disabilities, may lack information about programs that they are eligible for. It is imperative that people with disabilities be able to access health care. They are subject to greater health disparities than other groups. Members of racial and ethnic minority groups who have disabilities report worse health than minorities without disabilities.

But outreach and providing information must be done in an appropriate manner. Trust is a necessary factor when introducing a new program, especially a government program, in marginalized communities. Community-based organizations (CBOs) are key to success because they have a relationship and history within the community and these CBOs are sensitive to the concerns of the people they work with. BCID has gained the trust of people with disabilities because many of our staff are people with disabilities themselves. We are able to bring credibility to our work with consumers because they know we have had experiences similar to theirs.

The Affordable Care Act and other government programs have the potential bring great benefits to communities, but CBOs need to be involved to link programs with the people they are intended to benefit. Funding *ACCESS HEALTH NYC* will help create this linkage.

Thank you.

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