

Key Informant Interviews

Summary of the Key Informant Interviews – Conducted by McDowell Group, Inc. for the State Planning Grant, Health Planning and Systems Development, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Summer 2007. Presented to Alaska Health Summit, Dec. 5, 2007, by Eric Peter, Health Program Associate, HPSD/DPH/DHSS

“Key Informant” interviews targeted 50 individuals, all associated with an organization or agency with an interest in health insurance. Responses were grouped into the following categories: Advocacy/Research, Employers, Hospital/Administration, Social Services, Insurance, and Unions.

The responses included a broad spectrum of opinions about solving health insurance problems in Alaska. To some extent they defy categorization, but there were some common threads running through them. The Key Informant Interviews report is available on line at the State Planning Grant web page:

<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/commissioner/Healthplanning/planningGrant/assets/keyInformantsReport.pdf>

The high cost of health insurance is a common theme in the interviews, both in how it affects accessibility by the working poor and to working people in general. High cost was considered to result from:

- Little competition,
- High demand for services,
- High cost of living in Alaska, and
- Medical providers charging maximum fees.

A common theme in the interviews was the idea that many uninsured Alaskans are working, but cannot afford health insurance for themselves or their children. Nearly all interviewees supported expanding eligibility requirements for Denali KidCare, and some supported a similar expansion of Medicaid. Many recognized the consequences of not having health insurance; that medical problems go untreated until as a last resort people go the emergency room, which is the most expensive kind of care and where costs are spread to those who can afford to pay.

As we saw in the forums on health insurance, and in the focus groups, people feel that individuals should lead healthy life styles, but the opinions on who is ultimately responsible for providing health insurance are diverse.

Nearly all of those interviewed saw current problems with the Medicare system. Reimbursement rates are much too low and not enough doctors are willing to accept Medicare. Several contacts talked about how difficult it is for those reaching retirement age to cope with the shift to Medicare, where they may have more difficulty finding a source of care than earlier, at a time when their health care needs are rising. The problems with Medicare were often referenced as reasons to avoid any expansion of the government’s role in health care.