

Outreach

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Why Do We Need Outreach?

The rules have changed!

In January 2019 Virginia's new Medicaid Expansion became available. Even though this was five years ago, many adults may not realize this exists or may not think they qualify. People working in agriculture, retail, construction, childcare, landscaping, hospitality, food service or other jobs that do not offer health insurance are likely to be eligible for this free or low-cost health insurance.

Additional changes since that time have further expanded/extended coverage for certain groups:

- In April 2021 a long-standing 40 work quarter requirement for eligibility was removed for Legal Permanent Residents ("Green Card Holders").
- On July 1, 2021, FAMIS Prenatal Coverage became available for those pregnant individuals who did not meet immigration status rules for other Medicaid categories.
- On July 1, 2022, Virginia extended postpartum coverage in Medicaid for Pregnant Women and FAMIS MOMS to 12 full months.
- And, on January 1, 2024, Virginia implemented a new federal rule requiring 12 months of continuous coverage for most children, even if their situation changes.

Many have not heard about these new Medicaid eligibility criteria either. Some have applied for Medicaid or FAMIS in the past, but were denied. Still others may be confused about when or how to apply. Many families and individuals may need assistance completing the application, navigating the process and/or understanding the value of comprehensive health insurance. You may be just the right person to reach out to them and make the difference!

You can help people overcome these and other barriers like:

- Confusion about when to apply (*anytime!*)
- Obtaining required documentation (*including proof of income, like pay stubs from multiple jobs or documenting income from seasonal work; unemployment income; Social Security benefits; and a birth certificate to verify identity and citizenship*)
- Low literacy or speaking English as a second language
- Understanding the value of having health insurance
- Pride or stigma about receiving government benefits
- Understanding and completing the required annual renewal process

Now that you know the ins and outs of how to help people apply, this section of the Tool Kit contains effective strategies for connecting with individuals and families who may be eligible for Virginia's Medicaid or FAMIS programs and encouraging them to apply.

How You Can Help

One thing is critical to the success of the outreach efforts - multiple touch points with individuals and families. People need to see and hear information about a program multiple times before they are moved to act. And, targeted community-based efforts to reach people where they live, work, learn, play and pray are critical to make sure everyone who is eligible gets and stays enrolled.

What To Say

Experience from other states that have expanded Medicaid provide good insights into how to talk with people about the Medicaid Expansion coverage and how to encourage them to apply.

Explain that Virginia's Medicaid rules have changed.

- Free or low-cost health insurance became available to more adults in 2019! Adult Virginians can work and still qualify. Individuals can earn about \$21,597/year and a household of 3 can earn more than \$36,777/year.
- Free or low-cost health insurance became available to pregnant individuals with qualifying incomes who do not meet immigration status requirements on July 1, 2021. This includes undocumented pregnant women.
- The income rules are based on monthly income, before taxes.
- Assets and resources such as a person's home, car and retirement are not counted in determining eligibility.

Other important messages:

- Medicaid provides financial protection and stability to families.
- Now, people don't have to choose between paying for groceries and paying for health care or medicine.
- Medicaid coverage gives enrollees and their families' peace of mind from the costs related to health problems and big medical bills/medical debt.
- Medicaid and FAMIS are not welfare. They are quality health insurance programs which offer excellent coverage.

Talk to the People You Know

Connecting people to Medicaid and FAMIS is all about relationships. Reach out to people you already know or who have a connection with those who may be eligible.

- ***Start with your family and friends.*** Many of us know individuals and families who may be eligible for Medicaid or FAMIS. Talk to those close to home - family, friends, and neighbors. Family members, particularly moms, are among the most influential in encouraging people to apply.
- ***Check where you work.*** Does your employer provide health insurance? Is the employee share of it affordable? Does your employer have “contract”, temporary, or part-time workers who may not be eligible for benefits? Employers can share information about Medicaid and FAMIS upon hire, at open enrollment for benefits, at key life events (birth/adoption, marriage, divorce) or when employees leave the company.
- ***Consider your clubs, organizations, and associations.*** Most civic, social groups want to support their members and their families. Can you make a presentation to the group about Medicaid and FAMIS, put an article in the newsletter, or distribute Cover Virginia printed materials? Would members help get the word out or help people apply?
- ***Involve your faith community.*** Access to health care is a priority in some congregations as a special project or mission or through a health ministry. Effective outreach strategies range from arranging for special “sign-up days,” educating the congregation through a bulletin insert, or presenting at a group meeting.
- ***Encourage your child’s school to educate staff and families.*** Schools know that a healthy family is critical to student success. Make sure the front office or nurse’s office has Cover Virginia and FAMIS posters prominently displayed that direct parents to someone who can give them more information about how to apply. Encourage your school to have a CommonHelp eApplication Station in the library where parents can apply online. Distribute information at school events (science fair, Back-to-School Night, sports games, and registration). It is not unusual for some school staff to find that they themselves are eligible!

How to Find People in the Community

Connecting people to Medicaid and FAMIS is all about relationships. Reach out to people you already know or who have a connection with those who may be eligible.

Housing Partners

Contact management at apartment communities where potentially-eligible Virginians may live. Ask them to include information in welcome packets. See if they would display Cover Virginia brochures and posters in common areas of apartment buildings (lobbies, laundry rooms) or the rental office, the community pool, park or playground.

Employer Partners

While about half of potentially-eligible Virginians work, many are self-employed, independent contractors, work in seasonal jobs or for employers that do not offer health insurance. Employer types to consider contacting include: hospitality, hairdressers, barbers, restaurants, day care facilities, landscaping, trades (plumbing, electric), day labor, and workforce training programs. Reach the self-employed or independent contractors where they purchase or rent work-related equipment or supplies.

Retail Partners

Ask managers and owners of businesses where those who are potentially-eligible shop at regularly if they would display Cover Virginia brochures or posters. Consider these retail partners: thrift stores, gas station and convenience stores, supermarkets, car parts stores, drug stores and Walmart.

Recreation Opportunities

Places people to go have fun or relax are another opportunity to reach potentially-eligible Virginians. Consider these potential opportunities: professional, community or school sporting events, gyms, movie theaters, libraries and community centers.

Community Organizations

Contact leaders at local nonprofit agencies that serve people who may be eligible for Medicaid or FAMIS. Most communities have a food bank, income tax assistance programs, Head Start, re-entry programs, Goodwill, Salvation Army, volunteer fire and rescue organizations, parent support groups or housing-related organizations. Encourage them to provide information about Medicaid and FAMIS to clients, train key staff so they can answer questions and direct clients to application assistance or even build application assistance into the services they provide to clients and their families. Some nonprofit employees and their family members may be eligible for coverage, too!

Tip: Strong relationships with community partners are a key to effective outreach. The success of outreach partnerships is about the relationship between two organizations and their respective staffs. They include: shared organizational goals and values (importance of health and health insurance), supportive leadership and staff and comfort with the individuals and families needing help. Effective communication between partners is critical.

Reach People at Events

Host special enrollment events, offering people help completing the application on site. Set up tables at a pop up or temporary enrollment site (maybe a “Sign Up Saturdays” at a library or church), publicize it and have assisters available to provide help as consumers work on applications. Be sure to tell people to bring proof of income, and birth certificates or citizenship documents, so they have the key information needed to apply. Community events (health fairs, cultural events) are one way to raise awareness about Medicaid and FAMIS and the availability of application assistance. To increase the impact of participation in events, provide a “commit card” to people who stop by the table or booth so they can leave their name, contact information and permission for you to follow-up with them after the event to offer application assistance.

- A highly effective way to start talking with people about Medicaid or FAMIS at events is to ask “if they have heard about Medicaid Expansion coverage for adults”. During the conversation ask if anyone they know is uninsured.
- If you prepare brochures or flyers for people who may be eligible, be sure they are simple and easy to read.

Tips to Make 1:1 Assistance Most Effective

Many people need help applying for Medicaid or FAMIS. This is especially true for people who are not native English speakers, have limited education or low literacy skills. Here are some solid steps you can take to help them complete and submit their application.

Help Complete the Application

- Ask the applicant to complete a consent form, giving the assister permission to help them with the application process.
- Provide a list of “what to bring to your appointment”, so applications can be completed in one sitting.
- Help the family or the individual contact the Cover Virginia Call Center to apply or help them complete the *Application for Health Coverage & Help Paying Costs* on CommonHelp or a paper application.
- Help them gather needed verifications.
- Let them know what letters they may get from DSS or Cover Virginia and offer to help them follow up with the next steps.
- Create easy to remember usernames and passwords for CommonHelp applications. Give the applicant a form to write them on, so they can log in later.

Be a Go-between for the Applicant with the Cover Virginia Call Center and Central Processing Unit or the Local DSS

- Have the applicant fill in the middle section of Appendix C on the paper Application, or in the appropriate place on the online application, so you can discuss their case with DSS or the Call Center on their behalf.
- If you help families/individuals apply on paper via the LDSS, get to know the eligibility workers and how they prefer you to submit applications to them.
- If the family’s application is denied and they don’t understand why, help them call their local DSS or the Cover VA Call Center and talk with a worker. If the applicant wants to appeal the denial, help them prepare for the appeal.

After Enrollment

- Teach the individual/family about using health insurance
- Once enrolled, the person/family must choose a Managed Care Organization (MCO) and a doctor. Make sure they understand that they can choose another physician and/or MCO from the one listed on the enrollment letter from DMAS.

- Encourage the family/individual to use the preventive care available to them, as well as going to the doctor when they're sick.
- Demonstrate the comparison tool on the website showing the extra benefits each MCO provides (including glasses and dental care, so they can factor that into their decision).

Remind the Individual/Family about Their Responsibilities

- Tell them that they need to inform local DSS, or Cover VA, within 10 days if they have a change of address or phone number or a change in family circumstances that could affect eligibility. Important things to report are: a raise/cut in pay, a family member moving into or out of the home; or if the family/person moves to another state.
- Let them know that they must renew their eligibility after 12 months. Tell them to open all mail from the local Department of Social Services, the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services, or Cover Virginia when it arrives.

Stay Connected with Other Assisters

- Network with other assisters to share best practices, work arounds for system challenges, and stay up-to-date with policy changes.
- Share information with other assisters in your community about where and when events are planned to prevent gaps and overlaps in outreach and enrollment efforts. Consider hosting some events together, as appropriate, to share the work and cost.

Strategies Human Service Agencies Can Use

Organizations that already provide services to low-income individuals and families should consider how they can best provide information about the new Medicaid coverage and possible application assistance to those they serve as a part of their regular services. Here are some good strategies.

- **Train staff and volunteers to help.** Staff who come into contact with potentially-eligible individuals and families should become informed about Virginia's Medicaid and FAMIS programs and be able to offer advice and encouragement to apply. This includes intake or registration staff/volunteers and those who provide ongoing services to families. People are most likely to apply if they learn about the programs from someone they know and trust.
- **Check your client data.** Many organizations and programs already collect the information needed to screen a person for Medicaid or FAMIS. Basic information about income and health insurance status may be in your client database or files. See if there is a way to identify those who are most likely to be eligible and find ways to reach out to them to talk about Medicaid or FAMIS and to help them apply.
- **Incorporate screening into your intake process.** If your organization has an intake or registration process through which it collects information about individuals and families when they start receiving services, add a question about whether anyone in the family is uninsured. This is an easy way to identify potentially eligible people and either give them information or refer them to someone to help them apply.
- **Do a special mailing or eNewsletter.** Include information about Medicaid and FAMIS in a regular mailing to the people you serve or design a special mailing about the expanded Medicaid criteria. A letter from someone like a school principal, a doctor or nurse, or someone they know and trust adds credibility to the information and might encourage them to apply or ask for help. Put a link to coverva.dmas.virginia.gov on your organization's website and share information about it on Facebook.
- **Host an event.** Does your organization conduct health fairs or other events that draw people who might be eligible? Staff a booth or table to share information about Medicaid and FAMIS. Or, host a special pop-up event to help people apply.
- **Provide access to a computer and the Internet.** Provide access to a computer where someone can apply for Medicaid or FAMIS online. If possible, help them complete the application and submit required verifications.
- **Provide copying, faxing, or information.** Sometimes the simplest things can help expedite an application. Many people do not have easy access to a scanner, copier or fax machine. They may not know the mailing address of the local DSS. If you can provide these basic supports, you can really make a difference.
- **Collaborate with others.** Multiply the strength of your efforts by getting others involved. Host a meeting and invite other programs and agencies in your area that could help with outreach. Share ideas and resources to create the spark that get more Virginians enrolled and able to access to the health care they need!

Strategies Employers Can Use

Most uninsured Virginians are working or are in families where at least one person is working. Employers, especially those with a lot of potentially-eligible workers should be encouraged to help. Effective strategies follow.

- Determine if there are company employees who may be eligible. An adult can earn about \$1,800 a month (\$20,597 a year) and meet the financial rules for Medicaid Expansion for Adults. Other Medicaid and FAMIS programs are available for parents, children, and pregnant women. Programs for children and pregnant individuals have even higher income limits, \$4,553 a month or \$54,633 a year for a family of three, for example.
- Post flyers or posters in key locations (break rooms, bulletin boards, restrooms). Free brochures, rack cards, and other materials are available from <https://coverva.dmas.virginia.gov/partners/materials/>
- Put information about Medicaid and FAMIS in with paychecks/stubs.
- Include an article describing the Medicaid and FAMIS, who is eligible and the benefits in an employee newsletter. Repeat the information every six months.
- Arrange for a presentation about available coverage at an employee meeting.
- Include program information and an application in new employee packets.
- Inform employees about Medicaid and FAMIS before open enrollment periods for your company's insurance plan, so they can make a decision about what is best for them or their family.
- Train human resources/benefits staff to refer employees to the appropriate organization in your community to learn about Medicaid and FAMIS and get help applying. Or, if there is a large number of employees who may qualify, train company staff to help employees apply.
- Arrange for on-site application times before/after or during work hours where employees can meet with individuals trained to help them apply.
- Cooperate in verifying income or health insurance plan information if requested. Allow employees to use work computers to apply online. Allow access to copy machines and fax machines, to make it easy for employees to submit any required verification documents.
- If there is a layoff, work with HR to make sure employees get information about Medicaid and FAMIS in final paychecks or with severance information.
- Encourage your local Chamber of Commerce, business associations, and other employers to tell members and their workers about Medicaid and FAMIS.
- Serve as a spokesperson/representative from the business community and join local community efforts to raise awareness and increase enrollment.



Strategies for Hospitals & Health Systems

The value of health insurance is never clearer than when someone needs to use it. And, no one is more trusted as a resource than health care providers. Here are some ways hospitals can help connect families and individuals with Medicaid and FAMIS.

- Consider having your hospital participate in the Hospital Presumptive Eligibility program.
- Make sure appropriate staff know about Medicaid and FAMIS and provide information and make appropriate referrals. This includes ER, Labor and Delivery, triage clinics, plus financial counselors, social workers, human resources personnel, and front desk staff at primary care and pediatric practices.
- Train key staff to help individuals and families apply: with filling out the application, submitting verifications, following up on the status of the application during processing, and advocating on the behalf of applicants with the local DSS or Cover Virginia, if necessary.
- Put posters, brochures, and applications in key, highly visible areas: the ER, clinics, staff locker rooms, and the cafeteria. If possible, provide a local phone number where people can call with questions.
- Contact self-pay and/or sliding-fee patients and connect them with assisters.
- Send a flyer about Medicaid and FAMIS and how to apply in the bills of self-pay patients.
- Provide leadership to the community on increasing enrollment. Dedicate staff to design and carry out a comprehensive outreach campaign throughout the community: raise community awareness by speaking at schools, churches, civic organizations; sponsor public service announcements; have your public relations department create special materials; work directly with local businesses and schools to educate families about the importance of health insurance; and offer people a place to go for hands-on assistance with the application process.
- Many hospitals have lower wage workers who may be eligible. While these employees may be offered health insurance, they may not be able to afford it for themselves or family members. Make sure they know about Medicaid and FAMIS.
- Host *SignUpNow* trainings for community workers to learn about Medicaid and FAMIS and how to help people apply.



Strategies Schools Can Use

Schools have long been a key partner in enrolling children in Medicaid and FAMIS. Schools are also a great way to reach parents and other family members who may be eligible for the new adult coverage. Schools can receive Medicaid reimbursement for helping children and parents apply for Medicaid and FAMIS. Talk with the school district's Medicaid in Schools coordinator to learn more.

- Create a letter that the principal can send to parents stressing the importance of health insurance for their child's academic success and letting them know where they can receive additional information and/or application assistance.
- Add questions to the student emergency card - *Does your child/family have health insurance? Would you like to be contacted to learn more about Virginia's free and low-cost health insurance programs?* Arrange for the emergency cards to be screened and follow up with families that expressed interest in Medicaid and FAMIS.
- Have staff or a volunteer parent at PTA/PTO meetings to distribute material, collect names of people wanting additional information and/or application assistance, or recruit volunteers to help assist members of the school community in applying.
- Educate key staff (administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, school nurses, coaches, food service workers, human resources) so they can share information about Medicaid and FAMIS with families.
- Train nurses/clinic workers, and other school staff to assist families with the application (if feasible).
- Display posters and brochures in high traffic areas: administrative offices, school clinic/nurse's office, locker rooms, teachers' lounge, cafeteria, etc.
- Distribute a flyer (paper or electronic) to send home around the winter holidays, cold & flu season, Halloween ("It's scary to have no health insurance") and spring break, or with report cards, reminding parents that they/their kids can enroll in Medicaid and FAMIS year round.
- Send information home with parental permission slip for sports. Sports physicals are now covered as extra added benefits by all the Medicaid and FAMIS health plans.
- Put an article in the school or PTA/PTO newsletter(s) about Medicaid and FAMIS, who is eligible, and how to apply.
- Give an incentive to students for spreading the word. If they take home a flyer, have their parents read and sign it, and return it, then they get a prize.
- Get a club/class or team (especially middle or high school students) to become advocates for health insurance and develop their own outreach strategy.
- Look for opportunities to coordinate outreach efforts with school events, like school physicals, kindergarten registration, parents' night, parent/teacher conferences, sporting events, etc.
- Put a link to coverva.dmas.virginia.gov on school or district websites or share information on facebook and distribute information at community events and fairs (National Night Out, etc.).

