Health Care Navigators Research

How many health navigators are there?

It’s hard to get an exact estimate, as each state has received different levels of funding from the federal government to promote the program. Total, the federal government has issued about $67 million in grants to help set up and hire Healthcare Navigators, though various states have passed laws limiting the activities of the navigators. Total, there have been about 120 grants issued to 105 organizations, and this was on top of the $150 million that was issued to community health centers for “enrollment assistance.” However, it is important to note that this is only one component of health navigators, as the states that have their own exchanges also set aside their own, separate funding for navigators. For example, “California exchange intends to spend $37 million on navigators, and the Maryland exchange plans to spend $24 million on consumer assistance.”

Doing a bit of back-of-the-envelope math, you can roughly figure out how many health navigators there are as a result of federal funding. Since the average salary of a navigator is $63,400 per year, given the $67 million in grant funding, 1,100 healthcare navigators is probably a conservative estimate of the total amount. If you combine that number with the 130 Enroll America employees, you get roughly 1,230 navigators.

State Breakdown

Again, because it is essentially impossible to get the exact total of healthcare navigators as a result of the ACA, it’s hard to get a breakdown of the total navigators per state. CMS has a breakdown of the amount of grant money each state has received, which can be found here. The highest totals were in the biggest states, so California and Texas have the highest amount of health navigators.

How effective were they?

So far, there hasn’t been a major empirical study about how effective the health navigators were nationwide at signing people up for the Affordable Care Act. However, there have been mixed results about the actual effectiveness of the ACA navigators from an anecdotal perspective. A House panel (controlled by the Republicans) issued a report that was concerned the navigators would “risk privacy” and commit several errors, though Democrats were fairly critical of the report. However, it is likely different for each of the navigator programs that utilized federal funds. A California report found that they were often not adequately trained enough to help people buy insurance, though a report from the National Journal found that, by and large, the navigators did an effective job of informing people of their options.

How effective was Enroll America?

One of the more definitive accounts of Enroll America was done by former Washington Post writer Sarah Kliff. She found that generally, Enroll America was effective at focusing their efforts at areas that generally had high uninsured populations. Additionally, Enroll America was able to recruit a relatively large volunteer base for their efforts, as over 18,000 people volunteered to encourage people to sign up
for healthcare coverage. Enroll America has their own infographic that features some of their success, as they claim to have reached over 5 million consumers with their healthcare efforts.