



# Health Consumer Alliance For Immediate Release

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## Annual report shows dramatic impact of health consumer centers

*Expert help solves managed care problems, prevents consumers from losing coverage*

**Oakland, CA — November 16, 2001** — A report released today found that expert help from independent community programs allows many consumers to solve previously intractable problems with managed care and government health programs.

Today's report found that health consumer assistance programs participating in the Health Consumer Alliance (HCA), a coalition of groups in California helping low-income health consumers, achieved the following results:

- Consumer assistance programs obtained medically necessary health care for nearly seven in ten (68%) consumers who had health services denied or other service problems in HMOs.
- For two-thirds (65%) of consumers with coverage terminated from Medi-Cal, Healthy Families or similar programs, consumer assistance groups found that these denials were improper and persuaded government officials to restore the consumers' health coverage.
- Nearly half (47%) of consumers requesting help from consumer assistance programs suffered from chronic health problems, such as diabetes, asthma or high blood pressure. Providing care early in the development of chronic disease not only improves health, it can save money. According to research funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, chronic illnesses account for fully 75% of all health care costs.
- 71% of consumers contacting HCA found the assistance received very helpful. By contrast, only 17% of consumers who previously sought other sources of help found them very helpful.

"Health care today is complex, confusing and ever-changing," explained Stan Dorn, author of today's report. "When consumers get expert and independent help navigating the health care system, the results can be dramatic."

HCA's principal funder is The California Endowment, the state's largest health care philanthropy, which made an \$8.5 million, three-year grant to HCA and a similar organization serving four counties in the Sacramento area. This represents the nation's largest privately-funded pilot project testing the impact of consumer assistance on access to health care.

"Today, thousands of vulnerable consumers in part of the state get the expert guidance they need to obtain essential health care," added Gwen Walden, Senior Program Officer at The California Endowment. "If these programs continue to demonstrate their effectiveness,

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Health Consumer Alliance  
Partners

### consumer centers

#### Fresno County:

Fresno Health Consumer Center  
Central California Legal Services, Inc.  
2014 Tulare Street, Suite 502  
Fresno, CA 93721-2011  
800.300.1277

#### Los Angeles County:

Health Consumer Center of  
Los Angeles  
Neighborhood Legal Services of  
Los Angeles County  
13327 Van Nuys Boulevard  
Pacoima, CA 91331-3099  
800.896.3203

#### Orange County:

Orange County Health Consumer  
Action Center  
Legal Aid Society of Orange County  
902 North Main Street  
Santa Ana, CA 92701-3507  
800.834.5001

#### San Diego County:

Consumer Center for Health  
Education and Advocacy  
Legal Aid Society of San Diego  
1475 Sixth Avenue, Fourth Floor  
San Diego, CA 92101-3245  
877.734.3258 (877.SDHEALTH)  
(toll free)

#### San Francisco County:

Community Health Advocacy  
Project  
Bay Area Legal Aid  
50 Fell Street, First Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94102-5298  
800.551.5554

#### San Mateo County:

Health Consumer Center of  
San Mateo County  
Legal Aid Society of San Mateo  
County  
521 East Fifth Avenue  
San Mateo, CA 94402-1302  
800.381.8898

#### Lead Agency:

National Health Law Program  
2639 South La Cienega Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90034-2675  
310-204-6010

#### State Support:

Western Center on Law and  
Poverty  
3701 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 208  
Los Angeles, CA 90010-2809  
213-487-7211

we hope that in coming years state policy makers will make similar services available to other Californians experiencing problems with the health care system.” A bill to expand health consumer assistance programs is currently before the State Legislature and will be considered next year. Several other states, including Vermont and New Jersey, already fund independent health consumer assistance programs like those described in today’s report.

A partnership led by the National Health Law Program that also includes the Western Center on Law and Poverty, HCA provides direct services to low-income consumers through legal services agencies in six counties: Fresno, Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, San Francisco and San Mateo. Consumers get help free of charge either through telephone hotlines or in-person consultation, depending on the county and the consumer’s circumstances.

These agencies have earned consumers’ trust, according to today’s report, because of two factors: they are completely independent community groups uncontrolled by HMOs, employers, health care providers or government; and they are legal services organizations expert in consumers’ rights and responsibilities.

Although each agency uses its legal knowledge to diagnose and solve consumer problems, not one consumer problem was solved by a lawsuit during the year covered by today’s report, and only 1% required an administrative appeal for resolution. “We solve problems with phone calls rather than formal proceedings, whenever possible,” explained Lorraine Jones, HCA Director. “But the person on the other end of the line understands that we know the consumer’s legal rights and how to protect them.” The report released today is HCA’s Annual Report covering 2000-2001.

Following is a list of the local organizations covered by today’s report, with contact information for media and consumers:

COUNTY	HEALTH CONSUMER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM	MEDIA CONTACT	TOLL-FREE NUMBER FOR CONSUMERS
Fresno	Fresno Health Consumer Center	Chris Schneider, 559.570.1214 or Manuel Romero, 559.570.1212	800.300.1277
Los Angeles	Health Consumer Center of Los Angeles	Michele Melden, 818.834.7516	800. 896.3203
Orange	Health Consumer Action Center	Nancy Rimsha, 714.571.5229	800.834.5001 or 714.571.5200
San Diego	Consumer Center for Health Education and Advocacy	Gregory Knoll, 619.471.2620	877.734.3258 (877.SDHEALTH)
San Francisco	Community Health Advocacy Project	Mike Keys, 415.982.1300, ext. 314	800.551.5554
San Mateo	Health Consumer Center of San Mateo County	Peter Reid, 650.573.3945, ext. 307 or Stacey Hawver, 650.573.3945, ext. 317	800.381.8898

A similar program in the Sacramento area, the Health Rights Hotline, serves consumers of all income levels in El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento and Yolo Counties. The media contact for the Health Rights Hotline is Shelley Rouillard, 916.551.2181. In these counties, the toll-free number for consumers is 888-354-4474.