

Health Insurance For Youth Formerly in Foster Care

FOCUS ON MEDICAID COVERAGE IN ARIZONA
THE GOOD AND THE BAD: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT



As of January 2014, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires states to provide Medicaid coverage for youth who transition from foster care at age 18 until their 26th birthday. This coverage affords former foster youth (FFY) the same coverage as other young adults who may remain on their parents' commercial health insurance until age 26.

Even before the ACA, in 2000, Arizona chose to provide health insurance coverage to FFY through a special category of Medicaid until they reached the age of 21. Medicaid, known as the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System or AHCCCS in this state, created an eligibility category called Young Adult Transitional Insurance (YATI). Today, young adults who are or were in foster care on their 18th birthday (after January 1, 2010) are eligible for AHCCCS coverage until their 26th birthday, regardless of their income.

Although YATI has existed since 2000, there remain significant system barriers between AHCCCS, the Department of Economic Security (DES) and the Department of Child Safety (DCS) that prevent many of these young adults from getting enrolled in AHCCCS and maintaining enrollment without disruption. This policy brief examines these barriers and presents recommendations for action to assure all young adults from foster care who qualify for AHCCCS can get the health insurance coverage they need.



For more information or to get involved, contact us:
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The ACA also calls for state Medicaid agencies to use an “eligibility hierarchy” to determine eligibility for other Medicaid categories that precede the Former Foster Youth (FFY) category. While FFY are automatically eligible for YATI, they could also be eligible for another category that is higher up on the hierarchy and provides a greater array of services.

“Former foster youth may be enrolled in AHCCCS coverage in other categories that they qualify for. If they lose eligibility for those other categories, they should stay covered and automatically move into the YATI category. Unfortunately, some system gaps now prevent that from happening. While we work on system improvements, it is critical that former foster youth know they can enroll and re-enroll in AHCCCS anytime up until they turn 26 no matter what their income is.”

Dana Wolfe Naimark,
President & CEO,
Children’s Action Alliance

Providing Health Insurance for these young adults recognizes that youth in foster care have high rates of acute and chronic medical, mental health, and developmental problems, often as a result of their maltreatmentⁱ. Young adults who age out of foster care at age 18 are more likely than their non-foster care peers to report a health condition or disability that limits their daily activities and are less likely to have health coverageⁱⁱ. The ACA provision that covers these young adults ensures they have the ability to meet their health care needs responsibly.

YATI/AHCCCS coverage is available to young adults who meet the following eligibility requirements:

- In the custody of the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) or an Arizona Tribal foster care system on their 18th birthday and who were receiving AHCCCS medical coverage while in foster care;
- Are 18 through 25 years of age;
- Currently reside in Arizona; and
- Meet citizenship requirements or qualified immigration requirements.

Arizona residents who aged out of another state’s foster care system and individuals who no longer live in Arizona are not eligible for YATI. However, young adults who age out of foster care in another state but currently live in Arizona may be eligible for another AHCCCS eligibility category based on their income and household composition.

It is important to note that YATI does not require an income test. Young adults that meet the criteria cited above never lose eligibility until they reach their 26th birthday, even if they lose coverage in a category further up on the hierarchy.

In 2017, this Medicaid eligibility can provide coverage to an **estimated 5,500ⁱⁱⁱ young adults ages 18 through 25 in Arizona**. (This estimate does not include eligible youth in Tribal foster care).

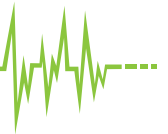
How Does A Former Foster Youth Enroll In AHCCCS / YATI

For young adults currently in foster care, their DCS case specialist or tribal caseworker should assist them in getting enrolled the month they turn age 18. Once a young adult is enrolled in AHCCCS (no matter whether is it the YATI eligibility category or a higher category in the hierarchy), they are eligible for AHCCCS YATI coverage up to their 26th birthday as long as they continue to reside in Arizona.

If a youth aged-out of Arizona foster care or Tribal foster care at age 18 but did not get enrolled in AHCCCS, or if enrolled and their FFY eligibility status (aka YATI eligibility) was not verified, these young adults can call Phoenix Day HealthLinks Program at (602) 252-4911, extension 104 for help with the enrollment application. Youth can also visit a Department of Economy Security (DES) eligibility office or signup on-line via the Health-e-Arizona Plus (HEAPlus) website, www.healtharizonaplus.gov.

At the Current Time, How Does A Former Foster Youth Stay Enrolled In AHCCCS / YATI

Eligible young adults qualify for YATI up to their 26th birthday and can enroll or re-enroll at any time (regardless of income). Under the current AHCCCS enrollment and renewal processes, these FFY young adults may periodically



receive an e-mail or mail communication from AHCCCS that requires a response. In order to stay enrolled in AHCCCS, it is critical for the young adult to respond to any request from AHCCCS. If a FFY young adult fails to respond to AHCCCS, they may become disenrolled and have to submit a new application to re-enroll, even though they remain eligible until they reach their 26th birthday.

Bad News—Enrollment Is Declining

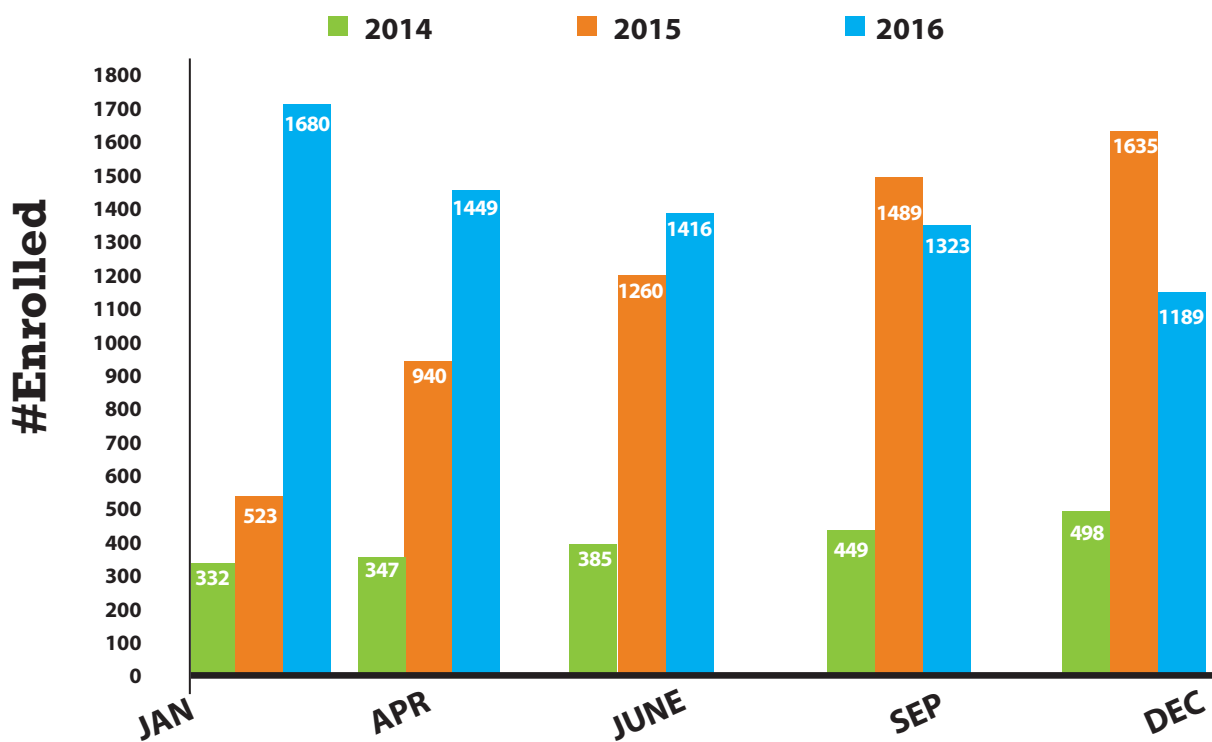
While there was an initial increase in the number of eligible FFY young adults enrolled in YATI following the implementation of the ACA, in the last twelve months (from January 2016 to December 2016), there has been a **30% reduction of enrolled young adults in YATI despite an increasing need for coverage and a growing number of eligible participants.**

Challenges Still Exist

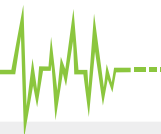
For young adults aging out of foster care, health insurance is critical. However, challenges and barriers still exist for them both in getting enrolled in and maintaining YATI coverage.

- While eligible youth can receive coverage up to age 26 regardless of income, AHCCCS requalifies them annually. This may not be necessary.
- The AHCCCS computer system does not currently have a unique identifier for former foster youth (FFY). Eligible young adults could be enrolled in another AHCCCS coverage category (other than YATI), but there is no reporting mechanism in place to track their enrollment. Therefore, the system does not automatically qualify an eligible young adult for YATI when necessary.
- Young people formerly in foster care move frequently and change phone numbers often. Based on AHCCCS current practices, this can result in lost communication between the young adult and AHCCCS and this leads to disenrollment.

YATI Enrollment Since The 2014 Former Foster Youth (FFY) Eligibility Requirements:



Approximate Estimate of Eligible Young Adults: 5,500



- DCS case specialists and tribal caseworkers are not well informed or trained on YATI coverage and the enrollment process. This results in some eligible young adults transitioning from foster care at age 18 never getting enrolled.
- The Department of Economic Security (DES) provides eligibility services for AHCCCS enrollment and uses a third party call center to screen initial eligibility calls. The contract employees are not trained specifically on YATI and may screen-out eligible young adults or route them into another income-based coverage category that may deny them coverage at the time of contact or later when their circumstances change.
- Systemic issues exist within AHCCCS' HEAPlus system that hinder a smooth enrollment process.

Recommendations

- **Streamline the automated system for enrollment and renewal processes so eligible young adults in foster care on their 18th birthday are enrolled in AHCCCS up to their 26th birthday without having to take action or provide verification themselves.**
- **Create a former foster care indicator in the AHCCCS computer system so that YATI eligibility can be tracked and identified regardless of what AHCCCS eligibility category the young adult may be in at any given time.**
- **Create a standardized YATI process map for DES, DCS, AHCCCS, the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona and tribal staff and contractors to adhere to.**
- **Design and implement uniform training on the YATI coverage category for DES, DCS, AHCCCS, Inter Tribal Council of Arizona and designated tribal staff and contractors.**
- **Add the YATI eligibility category to AHCCCS' public information on eligibility categories. See <https://www.azahcccs.gov/Members/Downloads/EligibilityRequirements.pdf> for this missing information.**
- **Explore eliminating requirements for YATI eligible young people from yearly income and documentation verification. Leave it up to the young adult to report changes if she/he is seeking a higher AHCCCS eligibility category. Federal guidance appears to imply that the FFY young adult only needs to be placed in the higher eligibility category if the state knows that they are eligible.**

It is important to note that the YATI eligibility category does not require an income test. Young adults that meet the former foster youth criteria never lose eligibility until their 26th birthday, even if they lose coverage in a category further up on the hierarchy.

“When I was 19 and a student at ASU, I got sick and had to go to the emergency room. I was given medication and sent home. Three weeks later I got a \$12,000 bill in the mail. I was shocked because I thought I had health insurance under the Young Adult Transitional Insurance (YATI) program until I turned 26. Without knowing, I had been dropped from the program. With the help of my caseworker, I re-enrolled and was able to get the emergency room visit covered, but the amount of stress that it created for me was unreal.”

Ray, Arizona young adult formerly in foster care



For immediate YATI enrollment assistance call Phoenix Day HealthLinks at (602) 252-4911, ext. 104

¹Lehmann, B., Guyer, J & Lewandowski, K. (2012) Child welfare and the Affordable Care Act: Key provisions for foster care children and youth. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center For Children and Families.

²Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K. & Vorhies, V. (2011) Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth; Outcomes at age 26. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

³Karla Mouw, Assistant Director, Comprehensive Medical & Dental Program, Arizona Department of Child Safety (personal email communication December 14, 2016).