

# News from Maternal and Child Health Access



**T**his year marked the beginning of coverage under Covered California, our state's name for the Affordable Care Act. MCHA contacted, enrolled, and fixed cases for nearly 20,000 people, and we are currently fielding more than 400 calls a month about health care coverage. In February, we held our first-ever daylong conference on oral health for pregnant women, heralded as "one of the best conferences I've ever been to" by high-level state dental policy experts. March saw us move into our second site at the Wellness Center at Historic General Hospital in Boyle Heights and take a lead role there in enrollment for health coverage and food programs. We completed a short video on women, children and access to health care in Boyle Heights (see our website). Over the summer, we grew our CalFresh (food stamp) program enrollment to two full-time staff. 2014 was our fifth year as the model Welcome Baby program for home visitation and the beginning of our second year overseeing thirteen new Welcome Baby home visitation programs replicating our own very successful program. We maintained our long-term, intensive case management program for pregnant and parenting women, submitting grants after funding cuts stopped the program in other agencies countywide. We expanded our training staff and took on additional county contracts that included training county staff on health coverage programs.

[And our advocacy work... got results!](#)

### *Rivera Lawsuit*

The lead plaintiff in this case, Robert, died of a preventable condition—pulmonary embolism—after waiting four months for a decision on his Medi-Cal application. These applications are supposed to be decided in no more than 45 days. Two months after Robert's death, his mother, Frances Rivera, received a barrage of letters from the state, one for every month since his application, saying he was eligible all along.

MCHA is a plaintiff in the Rivera lawsuit to make sure no one else dies needlessly waiting for coverage. MCHA has been helping pregnant women waiting for benefits who need emergency hospitalization to prevent miscarriage or who deliver still waiting for their Medi-Cal card.

By the spring, 900,000 people were waiting for Medi-Cal benefits. The backlog is now down to 134,000 people who the state says are likely eligible—that is still a huge number of people at risk, with most of them in Los Angeles. Another 20,000 statewide may not be eligible—but they have not received the denial notices to which they are entitled and need to request a hearing on their eligibility. Advocates are also concerned that this year's open enrollment period, now in process, will add scores of thousands of new Medi-Cal cases to the existing backlog. The lawsuit addresses both issues, seeking immediate benefits for the "likely eligible" and notices for the others. MCHA has also created materials about maintaining access for pregnant women, and how to get a newborn his/her Medi-Cal card so that infants don't miss needed visits. We've spread the word in our trainings countywide, to home visitation programs such as Welcome Baby, and in our own blasts and e-mailings.

### *State cuts off 35,000 pregnant women from coverage; MCHA steps up*

Around the first of November, MCHA saw an uptick in the number of pregnant women who lost their Medi-Cal coverage suddenly. Pregnant women on Medi-Cal have "Continuous Eligibility" and it is extremely rare that a woman would be cut off her Medi-Cal coverage during pregnancy. Advocates in other counties confirmed that a specific computer glitch was cutting off cases. While the state worked to fix the problem, MCHA informed doctors, clinics and programs working with pregnant

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## 2014—WHAT A YEAR! (Cont'd from page 1)

women that the problem would be fixed and not to turn away a pregnant woman for her visits or other care. With help from Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services staff, we fixed cases for women with scheduled Caesarian section

visits, other pregnancy-related surgeries, specialty consults—one provider insisted that MCHA guarantee payment for a needed echocardiogram, and for one woman in labor on the way to the hospital! She called to thank us after giving birth. MCHA was able to make suggestions on the notices sent to women about the state's error.

### *Pregnant applicants eligible for Medi-Cal or AIM at risk*

For the current Open Enrollment period (November 15 through February 15), we are very concerned because the navigation on the state's computer for pregnant women in the "pregnancy-related" Medi-Cal income range and the Access for Infants and Mothers program (AIM, now called MAP) income range, a little higher than Medi-Cal, is misleading.

In the case of Medi-Cal, the women are enrolled in Covered CA along with Medi-Cal, without being told that dual enrollment will block their Medi-Cal cards for all maternity benefits, because of how the state has decided to implement Medi-Cal's "payer of last resort" rules (also known as "Other Health Coverage", or OHC), or that they have the choice to accept only the Medi-Cal, without facing any tax penalty. So the women end up having to pay premiums and hospital co-pays when instead they could be using free Medi-Cal during their pregnancies.

For AIM/MAP, women are enrolled in Covered CA – AIM/MAP is not a choice in the state's computer application, and women are contacted after the fact about AIM. Not surprisingly, few women change at that point, and so they miss out on comprehensive coverage from AIM, which costs only 1.5% of annual income with no co-pays, much more affordable than Covered California. Although MCHA worked with the state to inform women on the application website about their options for Medi-Cal and AIM/MAP, the new website design for this year's Covered CA open enrollment dropped the information. MCHA has brought these issues to the attention of the federal Centers for Medicaid and Medicare, which is looking into the issue, and we continue to fight hard to ensure that pregnant women are informed of their lowest cost options for health coverage during pregnancy.

### *State decides to wait on Premium Assistance for pregnant women and newly qualified immigrants*

SB 857, which MCHA championed as part of the state budget in June, 2014, did two things: 1) established a process for determining how the state will pay private, Covered California health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket costs for low-income pregnant women, through a program known as "Premium Assistance", without losing Medi-Cal's Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program (CPSP) and other Medi-Cal maternity benefits, and for immigrants in the U.S. less than five years, and 2) allowed many pregnant women with income up to 138% (up from 60% FPL) full-scope instead of only "pregnancy-related"

Medi-Cal <http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Pages/Affordability-and-Benefit-Program.aspx>

The Department of Health Care Services recently announced that the increase to 138% will take place sometime in January-February of 2015, but the Premium Assistance component will be delayed until January, 2016. MCHA is pleased to have the additional time to work out important policy details.

### *State must accept pregnant women over 30 weeks pregnant for AIM/MAP program!*

Since its beginnings, the Access for Infants and Mothers program (AIM), now called the Medi-Cal Access Program (MAP), has rejected women over 30 weeks pregnant at the time the state receives the complete application. MCHA has advocated changing this rule for years, but with more intensity recently. AIM/MAP is funded by the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, discrimination based on a pre-existing condition is now outlawed. Pregnancy is a pre-existing condition – at 2 weeks or 30 weeks. MCHA was heard! CMS urged California to end this rule, and the state recently agreed to do so. MCHA just assisted our first client since this change in policy. She had been charged for one visit already and could not afford the high risk specialist she needed to see since developing diabetes. MCHA arranged her AIM/MAP prenatal visit and followed up several days in a row with state staff to be sure her application was processed and her eligibility would show up at the specialist visit.

We are still awaiting a written rule change. Please call MCH Access for any assistance in 30-week cases - additional volume will help put pressure on the state to issue the new rule in writing.

### *MCHA urges state to review requirements for Medi-Cal coverage in pregnancy, resulting in expanded dental care for all pregnant adults!*

Research shows that dental disease is linked to premature births and, therefore, low birthweight births, which, combined, are the second leading cause of infant death in the United States. Preterm deliveries also put the mother's health at risk. Dental services during pregnancy are both necessary and safe, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Dental Association. MCHA advocated long and hard for the state to restore Medi-Cal coverage of adult dental services that had been eliminated in 2009 for all adults, but particularly for pregnant women. In 2014 we were successful in seeing partial restoration for adults, including fillings in front teeth, prefabricated crowns, full dentures, and similar services. Exams and cleaning were always available to pregnant women, even when other adult dental benefits were cut. Pregnant women also receive gum treatments not restored for other adults. MCHA's work continues to ensure that dentists and obstetricians know these benefits exist and should be used. The option for fillings would have helped Linda, whose voice mail left for Monica Ochoa, Oral Health Advocacy Coordinator, is featured on our video about our February conference, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7Uo79jEioc&feature=youtu.be>. She called in January—5 ½ months pregnant and needing fillings, a service not restored until May, four months later.

## Neither Rain, Nor Snow, Nor Sleet, Nor...*Electrical Failure* ...Will Keep Us from Health Care Enrollments!



Donald Nollar and Ana Valenzuela with the Mendez's.

construction noise, dust, and huge trucks, the situation got even worse in late August, when construction workers sliced through a major electrical cable and our electricity was cut off. With no elevator, lights

**A**t MCHA, serving our clients—ensuring they have the best outcomes possible—is paramount. Like most of downtown LA, the area around MCHA is rapidly developing. As challenging as it is to work amidst

in the stairwells, phones or computers, it was not safe to work in our office. But the Mendez's, whose original application we had helped submit, had traveled all the way from La Puente for assistance with their health coverage renewal, now a six-page form with complex questions about taxes and tax households. Ana Valenzuela, Health Programs Outreach Worker, is the one they trusted to help renew their health coverage and add on an existing family member whose private insurance, they learned from MCHA, could be supplemented with Medi-Cal. Ana cautiously walked up four flights of stairs, with the light from her phone guiding her, to get the family's existing paperwork. She then worked on our agency's front patio with Donald Nollar, Health Programs and Benefits Trainer, to get the renewal completed and submitted on time so that the Mendez's and their three children would suffer no gaps in coverage. Thank you Ana and Donald!

## SCHOOL BELLS RING— AND NEW MENTAL HEALTH INTERNSHIP PROGRAM!

**MCHA** is committed to supporting our staff who want to improve their skills and knowledge. MCHA provides two paid hours off per week for study or school in a major that pertains to their work. Last year we hosted UCLA nurses in their public health rotation and allowed them to "shadow" our staff making home visits. With the First 5 LA-funded Welcome Baby program expansion to 13 additional hospitals, nurse and parent coaches (home visitors) from those programs will be accompanying our nurses and parent coaches on home visits early next year, then our staff will see the visiting agency staff in their home visits. This one-on-one initiation to field learning is invaluable, albeit time consuming for staff, students, and the clients who give permission for the visits.

- MoNesha LaViolette and Elena Bazini are working towards their Bachelor's of Science in Nursing.
- Claudia Sison earned her Masters in Social Work (MSW) and is completing hours to be a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, as is Lily Gomez, Parent Coach, and Carolina Valle, our Resource Specialist in Welcome Baby.
- Charcia Smith, Parent Coach, is studying toward her Associates in Arts degree—she's already a Doula!
- Ebony Middlebrook, another of our Welcome Baby Parent Coaches, is working toward a Masters in Forensic Psychology.

- Sara Montes, who used to work in our Perinatal Outreach and Education Program, left MCHA in pursuit of her MSW and is now working with us on a grant writing project for support for parents in the US with children in their home countries. The project fulfills her research need and benefits us as it will result in a grant to be submitted from MCHA.

Denise Cervantes, one of our home visitation staff, is pursuing her clinical internship at MCHA under the supervision of our LCSW candidate Teresa Garcia Leyes, MSW. Denise is pioneering what we hope will become a stronger mental health component of our work, our mental health internship. Often counseling isn't available at all in the community, or if it is, women just don't make it to appointments due to competing pressures or their illness itself. Denise is doing a fantastic job seeing individual clients, setting up group support sessions, and working on an MCHA application to qualify for mental health funding from Los Angeles County. We are already getting requests to accept interns for upcoming semesters! MCHA Mental Health Interns will get the training and support to provide client-centered care that meets the needs of the person they are working with, which includes in home therapy with individuals or families.

We are immensely proud to play important mentoring and support roles in the Los Angeles communities of social work, mental health and support services, and look forward to strengthening and expanding those roles.

## By the Numbers!

### MCHA IN 2014 (THROUGH NOVEMBER)

**17,000** individuals reached for enrollment into health programs, referrals to services, or fixing problems with their health coverage

**1,700** women and their new babies and families received support and assistance in their homes

**60** pregnant or postpartum women and their families in our pregnancy case management program that lasts up to two years

**170** strollers, bassinets, cribs or pack-n-plays to have a place for baby to sleep

**1,000's** of packs of diapers given – thank you Baby to Baby and Diaper Drivels

**250** women assisted with their family's short-term needs—domestic violence, shelter, benefits, or other assistance

**150** different women came to weekly health education classes

**235,000** pregnant women have more dental benefits than they did in 2013

**1** lawsuit filed to help ease the months-long waits for low-income people who applied for Medi-Cal



Luz Chacon, left, and Claudia Sison with the offending pacifiers, purchased so no one else could!

## NO HONEY BABY'S FIRST YEAR!

**MCHA's** advocacy changes lives - of our individual clients, their communities, and through statewide policy improvements. One recent example involves infants and honey. Honey is not good for babies just because it is pure sugar, but in addition, contaminated honey contains clostridium bacteria, which can cause infant botulism. See <http://www.infantbotulism.org/>. By age one, infants' intestines have a balance of acids that help destroy and fight off any toxins that the botulism bacteria produce, but for an infant under one year old, botulism can be dangerous.

Our Welcome Baby Parent Coach and recent Masters in Social Work graduate/Certified Lactation Educator Claudia Sison discovered a potential health hazard:

"At a recent home visit, our client showed me a pacifier that she was giving to her newborn. I noticed that it looked funny, like an uninflated pacifier. I asked her about it, and she told me that it starts to look funny as the baby sucks the honey out of it. I felt like my mind was exploding. She went on to explain that she got it at a baby store nearby. She was told to poke a hole and let her baby suck out the honey slowly. She also told me that there are a couple of stores in the community that are selling these pacifiers. I informed her of the dangers, and she threw it away as we spoke about it."

...for an infant *under one year old*, botulism can be *dangerous*.

But the work didn't stop there. Claudia and her Program Director, Luz Chacon, MPH, CLE, who herself worked in community health education for many years, went to the store where the pacifiers were being sold and purchased all of them to try to prevent other families from exposing babies to this risk. Claudia also gave the clerk information to share with the store owner about the dangers of botulism.

Luz took the next step to protect babies across the state. She filed a report with the Consumer Products Safety Commission, and also

alerted the Food and Drug Administration. We contacted various WIC (Women, Infants, and Children program) offices to inform them of these sales in the community, and they alerted their staff.

Last, we contacted the California Poison Control System health education and outreach, in case they wanted to use the information in their Home and Safety outreach texts. In the meanwhile, we are

waiting for the final reports from the state and federal agencies. We hope that imports such as these are blocked in the future, and we will continue to get the word out at the individual and community level!

For more information go to <http://www.infantbotulism.org/>

## Thanks to Our Generous Contributors:

Our apologies for any misspellings or omissions. Please call (213) 749-4261 ext. 110 or [info@mchaccess.org](mailto:info@mchaccess.org) with corrections.

- Anthem Blue Cross
- Berke Family Foundation
- Blue Shield of California
- California Association of Food Banks
- California Community Foundation
- California Poison Control
- Cirque du Soleil
- City of Los Angeles Community Arts
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- The California Endowment
- The California Wellness Foundation
- Ten Thousand Villages, Pasadena Store

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\*Organizations listed for  
identification purposes only.

## Wish List {Our United Way donation number is 595702 for workplace giving.}

- Holiday gifts for families, such as gift cards for food or department stores, blankets and children's toys.
- New or gently used maternity or baby/children's clothing
- New or gently used bedding/towels
- New or gently used slings or other baby carriers and bassinets
- Household items – kitchen items such as pots and pans, dishware, silverware, and plastic storage ware with lids
- Small gift items we can use for raffle prizes in health classes
- Educational toys, children's books in Spanish and English, art supplies, school supplies
- Childproofing items: locks, table corners, cabinet closures, plug covers
- Sewing machines that work well or need only small repairs
- Soft yarn for knitting scarves and hats – linen cotton, wool best or nice fluffy colors in acrylic – or gift certificates for these items
- Fabric for aprons and purses made by our Women's Collective – colorful fun prints or bright solid colors, heavier fabric for lining, nice fabric for bags/purses – fabric or gift certificates to stores with the items, such as Joann's, Michael's or Michael Levine's
- Grocery, department store or other gift certificates
- New or gently used large gift bags for baby items we provide

### For our offices...

- Nice waiting room chairs that match!
- Digital camera
- Digital streaming large frame to show agency pictures in lobby
- Certificate-sized frames that match – for our awards
- Office supplies: color and white copy paper, HP Laserjet 5M printer toner, pens, staples
- Professional photography for our office and document/website publishing

## Maternal & Child Health Access

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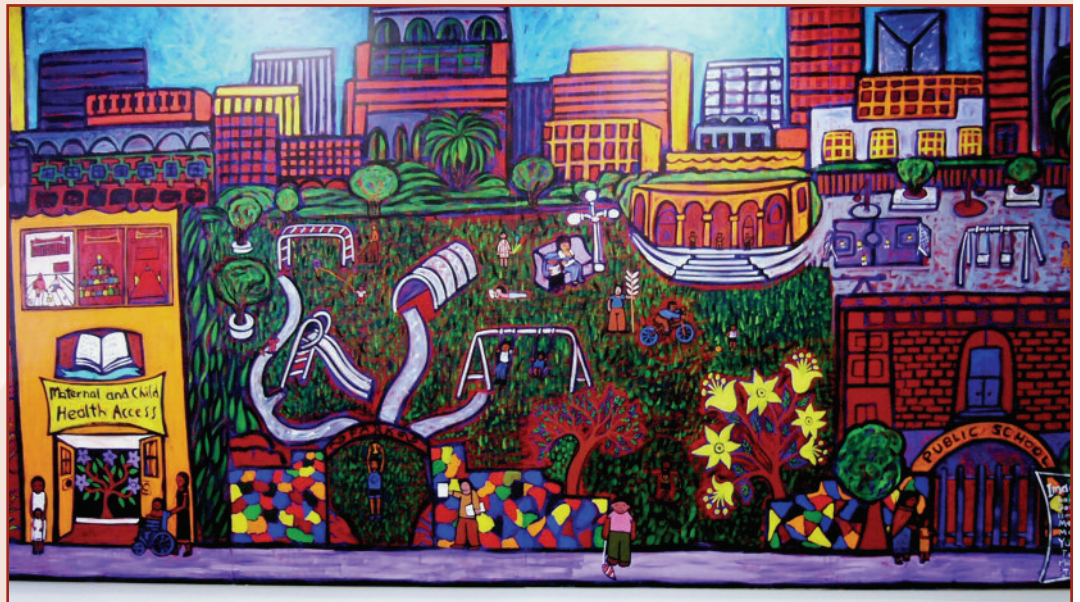
# mch Advocate

## Have enough stuff?

### Ask friends and family to donate to MCH Access!

We will send them a wonderful holiday (or other occasion) card and can craft the message to your specifications! See our website to direct a donation in honor of someone special, [www.mchaccess.org](http://www.mchaccess.org), or use the envelope in our mailing.

For orders after December 20th, know that the card or order may not arrive by Christmas.



## COLECTIVA ITEMS FOR SALE!

You may also request a handmade gift by a member of our Women's Collective—an apron, placemats or potholders—and give twice: to your recipient and to the Collective member! You may stop by our office and shop for aprons, pillows, potholders, cards, scarves and more from 9-5, M-F, or by appointment (call us at (213) 749-4261).

The Mujeres in Movimiento Women's Collective will have a table at both the Caracol sale and at the Anti Mall in Los Angeles:

### SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7TH, 11 AM-5PM CARACOL HOLIDAY MARKETPLACE

Tropico de Nopal Gallery Art-Space  
1665 Beverly Blvd, Los Angeles, California 90026  
<https://www.facebook.com/events/306012062921882/permalink/309747599214995/>

### SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14TH THE ANTI MALL AT DANZA FLORICANTO IN LOS ANGELES

4232 Whiteside St. Los Angeles, CA 90063  
<http://theantimall.weebly.com/>  
or on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/AntiMall1>