

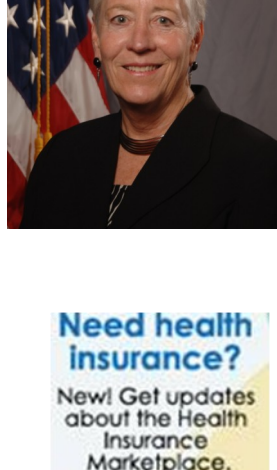
Regional Update from HHS Regional Director Susan Johnson Region 10 - Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington



Dear Colleagues:

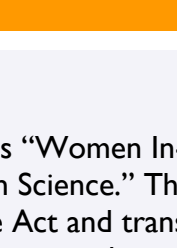
March 2013

This month we have been celebrating the third anniversary of the enactment of the Affordable Care Act. The benefits of the Affordable Care Act have already been far-reaching, and this is just the beginning. This law is giving Americans more security by increasing accountability for insurance companies, providing more control and choice for consumers, and helping more families achieve peace of mind that prevention buys with affordable health insurance.



Today, tens of millions of people in our region are already seeing some of the early benefits of the law including:

- Over 3 million people with private insurance now have access to preventive services without paying a dollar out of pocket.
- 114,000 Medicare beneficiaries with the highest prescription drug costs have saved an average of \$706 on their prescription drugs.
- 4.5 million people with private insurance no longer have to fear their benefits disappearing when they need them most because insurers can no longer put lifetime caps on the amount of care for which they pay.
- 105,000 young adults through age 26 have been able to remain covered on their parents plans.



These are just a few examples of what has been accomplished already, and over the next year, millions more will benefit as the law expands access to affordable health insurance. Millions more Americans will gain access to quality affordable health coverage when new Health Insurance Marketplaces open for enrollment on October 1, 2013 in every state, giving individuals and families a simple, convenient way to find coverage that fits their budget. Small business owners will also be able to buy in the Marketplace and will be able to pool together to have purchasing power similar to large businesses.

[Click here](#) to learn more about how much has already been accomplished in your state in the three years since the Affordable Care Act was signed into law.

I want to thank all of you for everything you have done to help implement the Affordable Care Act, whether it's providing your input as a stakeholder, working to establish a Marketplace in your state, or educating people in your community about the coverage that is coming. But we still have a lot to do over the next year – we need to keep building on this progress to give Americans the health care system they deserve.

Regards,
Susan

Recent HHS Events & Announcements

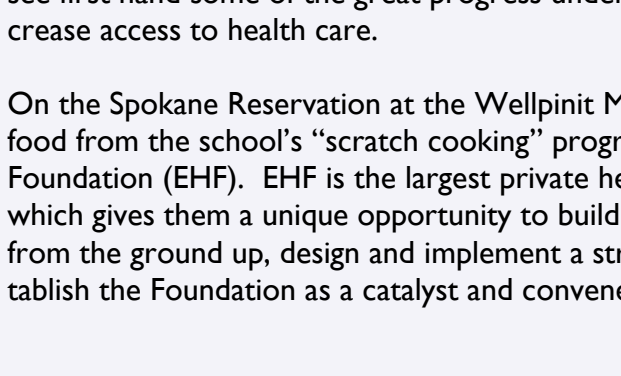
Women's History Month

March was Women's History Month, and this year's theme was "Women Inspiring Innovation Through Imagination: Celebrating Women in Science." This is especially fitting as we work to implement the Affordable Care Act and transform our health care system. So many extraordinary women have made major scientific breakthroughs that have saved countless lives.

The nation this year recognizes such extraordinary women as Patricia Era Bath (1942), whose invention of the Laserphaco Probe was an important milestone in the advent of laser cataract surgery; Rita R. Colwell (1934), the first woman director of the National Science Foundation; Susan A. Gerbi (1944), a molecular cell biologist whose research has potential significance in understanding the role of hormones in certain cancers; and Flossie Wong-Staal (1946), a virologist and molecular biologist whose work made it possible to develop HIV tests.

The success of women is critical to our families, communities, and nation. Preventive services save lives now because of scientific discoveries that have been achieved. It is because of strong women throughout history that women today have increased opportunities to fulfill their potential and are on a path towards full equality. As we move forward, we need to always remember the women who have come before us on this path so that we can work toward a better future for women everywhere.

[Click here](#) to read Secretary Sebelius' statement on Women's History Month.

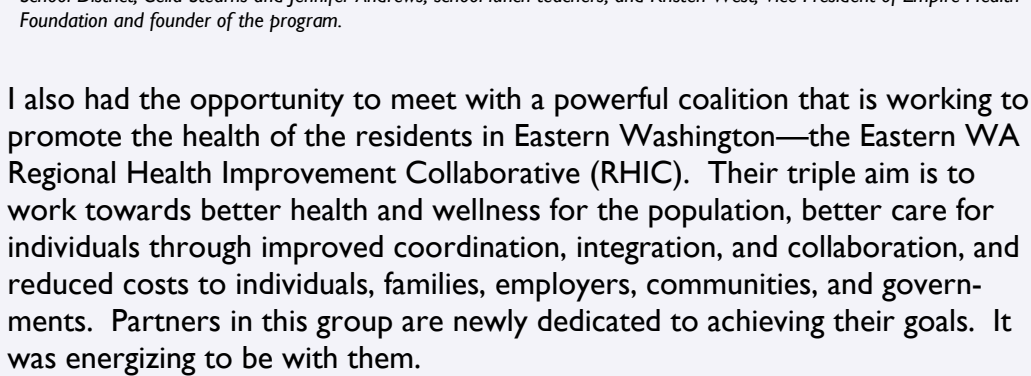


Speaking at the Bainbridge Island Chamber of Commerce March Breakfast about the progress being made on implementing the Affordable Care Act and what it means for both individuals and businesses. Pictured: Rex Oliver, President and CEO of the Bainbridge Island Chamber of Commerce; Susan Johnson; Carolyn Frame, Branch Manager of Guild Mortgage Company on Bainbridge Island

Working For Improved Health in Eastern Washington

I recently had the opportunity to travel to Spokane in Eastern Washington to see first hand some of the great progress underway to improve health and increase access to health care.

On the Spokane Reservation at the Wellpinit Middle and High School, I enjoyed food from the school's "scratch cooking" program funded by the Empire Health Foundation (EHF). EHF is the largest private health foundation in the region, which gives them a unique opportunity to build a philanthropic organization from the ground up, design and implement a strategic vision for impact, and establish the Foundation as a catalyst and convener in the region.



Enjoying the "scratch cooking" lunch. Pictured: Verna Kratzberg, school lunch teacher; Sarah Lyman, Senior Program Associate at Empire Health Foundation; Tim Ames, Superintendent at Wellpinit School District; Susan Johnson; Vicki LeBret, Wellpinit School District; Celia Stearns and Jennifer Andrews, school lunch teachers; and Kristen West, Vice President of Empire Health Foundation and founder of the program.

I also had the opportunity to meet with a powerful coalition that is working to promote the health of the residents in Eastern Washington—the Eastern WA Regional Health Improvement Collaborative (RHIC). Their triple aim is to work towards better health and wellness for the population, better care for individuals through improved coordination, integration, and collaboration, and reduced costs to individuals, families, employers, communities, and governments. Partners in this group are newly dedicated to achieving their goals. It was energizing to be with them.



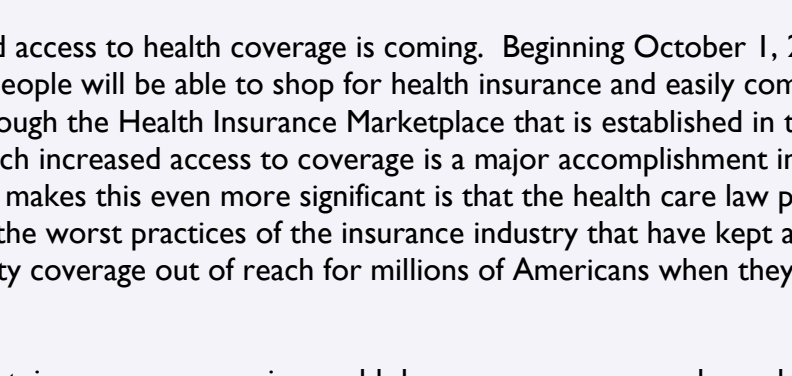
Susan Johnson with members of the Regional Health Improvement Collaborative and the Empire Health Foundation. Pictured: Antony Chiang, Sarah Bates, Courtney Shirk, Anne Whigham, Sharon Fairchild, Anne Cowles, Darin Neven, Craig Diaz, Kathy Thamm, Deanna Davis, Torney Smith, Brian Benzel, Toni Lodge, Deb Harper, Gary Stokes, Susan Johnson, Toni Cooley, Sue Lani Madsen, Kristen West, Garman Lutz, Douglas Burt, Matt Layton, Keith Baldwin, Brian Myers, Jeff Klein, Nick Beamer

I also spoke at a town hall forum hosted by Spokane Public Radio. The event focused on getting information out to constituents about what the Affordable Care Act means for them and providing an opportunity for questions. It was a packed house of 300 people for the 2 hour event.



Spokane Public Radio Health Forum. Panelists: Jeff B. Collins, M.D., Chief Medical Officer at Providence Health Care; Susan Johnson; William Lockwood, M.D., Medical Director at Community Health Association of Spokane; Michael Marchand, Director of Communications at the Washington Health Benefit Marketplace; Stephanie Marquis, Communications Manager at the Office of the Washington State Insurance Commissioner; Madeline Otto, Director of Federal Government Relations at Group Health Cooperative; Moderator Doug Nadvornick, WSU-Spokane. Photo courtesy of Spokane Public Radio.

[Click here](#) for more information on the Spokane Public Radio Health Forum including future broadcast times of this event.



With Spokane Mayor, David Condon having discussed health and social services in Spokane.

Consumer Protections

March 4th was Consumer Protection week, which makes this the perfect time to talk about some of the new rights and protections Americans have under the Affordable Care Act.

Improved access to health coverage is coming. Beginning October 1, 2013, millions of people will be able to shop for health insurance and easily compare plans through the Health Insurance Marketplace that is established in their state. Such increased access to coverage is a major accomplishment in itself, but what makes this even more significant is that the health care law prohibits some of the worst practices of the insurance industry that have kept affordable and quality coverage out of reach for millions of Americans when they needed it most.

In the past, insurance companies could deny you coverage or charge higher premiums because you were sick or had a pre-existing condition. Starting in 2014, the law makes these practices illegal. Insurers are also prohibited from charging you more because of your gender or occupation.

One of the other egregious practices that is already illegal is canceling coverage because you made an honest mistake on your application.

Additionally, under the new health care law insurance companies must provide consumers greater value by spending generally 80 percent of premium dollars on health care and quality improvements instead of overhead, executive salaries, or marketing. If they don't, they must provide consumers a rebate or reduce premiums. This year alone, 66,363 Region 10 residents with private insurance coverage will benefit from \$7,654,629 in rebates because of this new rule.

These consumer protections and others included in the Affordable Care Act mean that more Americans than ever before will have access to quality health insurance they can afford.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the new consumer protections under the Affordable Care Act.

To remove your name from our mailing list, please [click here](#).

Questions or comments? Please contact me at susan.johnson@hhs.gov or 206-615-2012.