

Affordable Care Act will create more jobs

Written by Jazelle Hunt, NNPA Washington Correspondent
Monday, 25 November 2013 11:46



WASHINGTON (NNPA) – Health care reform under the Affordable Care Act is off to a sickly start. There have been problems with the main marketplace website, calls for Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius' resignation, tepid enrollment numbers, and a series of presidential apologies.

But there's some good news amid all the bad: A new report from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies says a health care employment boom is on the horizon, riding in on the coattails of the embattled Affordable Care Act.

According to the report, *Affordable Care Act of 2010: Creating Job Opportunities for Racially and Ethnically Diverse Populations*, the health care sector could add 4.6 million jobs over the next decade – a 31 percent increase in the industry.

"The goal of this report is to provide knowledge that can help foster and enhance racial/ethnic diversity of the health care workforce," the authors write. "If we assume the current racial and ethnic distribution of the health care workforce persists, we would expect that in the future at least *one-third of the total health care workforce will comprise people of color [emphasis theirs]*."

As of last month, the unemployment rate for African Americans was 12.7 percent. At the same time, total unemployment within the health care industry was at 4.2 percent. Currently, Black professionals make up 15 percent of the health care workforce, most of them registered nurses, nursing aides, orderlies, and home care attendants.

Health care offers a high level of job security. Even without the ACA, the industry will continue to expand, as it has for decades. In fact, the industry was one of the few that continued to grow and hire during the Great Recession (in 2009 its unemployment rate was 5.3 percent; the national rate peaked at 10 percent that year, and 16.1 percent for African Americans). With the graying of America, continued widespread chronic illness, and the ACA's impact on hiring rates, the demand for health care professionals is poised to escalate.

Affordable Care Act will create more jobs

Written by Jazelle Hunt, NNPA Washington Correspondent
Monday, 25 November 2013 11:46

Medical positions involving office and emergency visits are expected to flourish most. By 2020, the report predicts an influx of 711,900 registered nurses alone. Nursing aides, medical administrators, pharmacy and some medical technicians, (such as those who draw blood or operate x-ray machines, will also be in demand.

The ACA will be responsible for a third of the growth in these jobs.

To properly determine how much growth could be attributed to the law, the authors examine job trends and statistics from a few data-collecting agencies, including the Bureau of Labor Statistics. They also use simulation software created specifically for the health industry to make projections. Based on the resulting data, the ACA is going to change the industry in two ways.

The first is through increased access, which will make primary and preventative maintenance popular and prevalent. Secondly, the mandates for insurance companies, and incentives for wellness programs, will create a ripple effect in which health care providers must accommodate new rules and methods.

To accommodate these new patients, rules, and methods, hospitals and doctors' offices will need to hire more people.

"The number of jobs available does not necessarily equal the number of qualified individuals available to fill these positions...". the authors write. "In order to ensure an adequate supply of new health workers, education and training programs will need to maintain their sizes and possibly need to grow."

A few high schools across the country have, or are, magnet programs for budding health professionals. The study also notes that some health care providers are offering their lower-skilled employees an opportunity to gain qualifications through on-the-job training, or through partnerships with vocational programs.

Not all segments of the health care profession will expand.

For example, there are enough physicians and surgeons at the moment (although African Americans only make up 1.5 percent of the ranks), according to the study. Demand for clinical lab techs (the people who examine and test patient samples) is also expected to stagnate. Dental hygienists are also already well accounted for (not to be confused with dental assistants, who will become more essential under the ACA).

Demand for home and long-term care specialists will likely remain unaffected.

The study gives policy suggestions to help capitalize on the pending industry growth. Each of the suggestions advocates support for educational, vocational, or professional development opportunities through career counseling, robust funding, and/or employer sponsorship.

Research shows that maximizing the opportunity for people of color to pursue health careers is associated with greater quality and access to care for all. The study also cites research that

Affordable Care Act will create more jobs

Written by Jazelle Hunt, NNPA Washington Correspondent
Monday, 25 November 2013 11:46

links health care job gains to better at-large job opportunities for people of color.

As the writers explain, "Policies and strategies to maximize the capacity of the population to pursue growing career opportunities and provide needed services will be essential to ensure better health outcomes in the United States."