

**Arise Citizens' Policy Project
and
Alabama Appleseed Center for Law & Justice, Inc.**

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New High-Risk Insurance Pool Opens July 1

Uninsured Alabamians with a pre-existing condition can now get coverage; applications available online

An important reform of the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act takes effect July 1 when Alabamians who have been without health coverage for at least six months and who have been denied coverage because of pre-existing health conditions will gain access to affordable, quality coverage. They will receive it through a new Pre-existing Condition Insurance Plan (PCIP) created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Nearly 1 million Alabamians under age 65 – more than a quarter of the state's non-elderly population – have a diagnosed pre-existing health condition, according to a May 27 report by Arise Citizens' Policy Project, Alabama Appleseed Center for Law & Justice, Inc., and Families USA. They are among the 57.2 million people nationwide who could have faced denial of coverage in the individual health insurance market before the new law passed.

“The new high-risk pool means peace of mind for thousands of Alabamians who have been locked out of health coverage,” ACPP executive director Kimble Forrister said. “As this and other major elements of health care reform roll out, people are going to wonder why it took so long to close the gaps in our system.”

To find the new coverage available in Alabama and information about the complete range of health coverage options available for consumers, visit www.healthcare.gov and search by ZIP code. The new website, launched July 1 by HHS, is the first to provide consumers and small business with nationwide information about private insurance, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, Medicare and other coverage options in one place. Federal officials are emphasizing that the PCIP is not the long-term solution to the insurance industry's practice of denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions; instead, it will serve as a bridge to 2014, when the reform law bans denials of coverage based on pre-existing conditions.

The PCIP is a separate program from the “high-risk” pools offered in some 30 states. Alabama officials chose not to broaden a small existing high-risk pool after the reform law offered the option of temporary federal funding for such expansion. They cited concerns about the state's responsibility to continue payment for benefits after federal support ran out.

“In the new federal high-risk pool, premiums will be similar to those charged to healthy Alabamians,” Alabama Appleseed executive director John Pickens said. “The days of penalizing people in the insurance market because they urgently need coverage are over.”

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Arise Citizens' Policy Project is a nonprofit statewide citizens' organization comprising 150 congregations and community groups that promote public policies to improve the lives of low-income Alabamians.

Alabama Appleseed Center for Law & Justice, Inc., is a nonprofit, non-partisan legal advocacy organization that works to identify and address root causes of injustice and inequality in Alabama.