

# State Spotlight:

## Oklahoma's Award-Winning Communications Campaign to Promote Medicaid Expansion Enrollment

Prepared by GMMB

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## Background

The Affordable Care Act's (ACA) Medicaid expansion allows for the expansion of Medicaid coverage to nearly all adults with incomes up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (\$17,774 for an individual in 2021) and provides states with an enhanced federal matching rate for their expansion populations. Since the passage of the ACA, 40 states and the District of Columbia have expanded Medicaid, leaving 11 states that have not expanded their programs. On June 30, 2020, the Oklahoma Medicaid Expansion Initiative, State Question 802, passed by a majority vote to expand Medicaid eligibility to adults ages 19 to 64 whose income is 138% of the federal poverty level or lower. In Oklahoma, enrollment in Medicaid coverage under expansion began on June 1, 2021, with coverage for these enrollees beginning on July 1, 2021. Oklahoma is one of six states that approved Medicaid expansion by ballot measure, along with Idaho, Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, and Utah. These states, and Virginia, are known as "late-expansion states," because they did not expand Medicaid until 2019 or after, while many states expanded as early as 2014. As one of the most recent states to successfully implement Medicaid expansion, this case study describes the Oklahoma Health Care Authority's approach to outreach and education in support of overall enrollment goals. Oklahoma's development and deployment of a data-driven integrated communications plan can be a model for other states who may also move to implement and enroll newly eligible adults in Medicaid expansion.

## Oklahoma's Approach

The Medicaid program in Oklahoma is known as SoonerCare. With the expansion of Medicaid, the Oklahoma Health Care Authority (OHCA) set a goal to enroll more than 200,000 newly eligible Oklahomans into SoonerCare within the first year, from June 2021 to July 2022. To help meet that goal, the communications staff at the agency led the creation of a statewide advertising campaign to reach Oklahomans newly eligible for SoonerCare. OHCA created an integrated communications plan, which included statewide media relations and partnerships with other stakeholders to bring awareness to all areas of the state.

Agency staff leveraged data to create personas representing the state's uninsured audience and develop a communications strategy. OHCA used data from the 2020 Census report to identify where newly eligible Oklahomans, ages 19 to 64 with a household income below 138% FPL, lived. By collaborating with their data division, the OHCA communications team was able to monitor enrollment in targeted counties to measure the effectiveness of outreach efforts. This also allowed them to make adjustments in areas with low enrollment rates. The communications staff partnered with OHCA's data team to clearly define the age, gender, ethnicity, race, and county of residence of eligible Oklahomans to allow the communications team to evaluate effectiveness and pivot messaging when needed.

Oklahoma divided the communications campaign into two phases to raise awareness among eligible Oklahomans about Medicaid expansion. The first phase focused on raising awareness of new eligibility rules and enrollment instructions statewide. The second phase targeted the 10 counties with lower enrollment compared to likely eligible projections.

Challenges and barriers included reaching Oklahomans who live in rural parts of the state with information about Medicaid eligibility and enrollment recognizing varied internet access, and more limited numbers of healthcare providers and community partners. Additionally, OHCA research found that rural Oklahomans were less likely to trust government programs, and thus were not as inclined to enroll even if they knew their options.

## Media Implementation and Key Messages

The OHCA communications team developed a robust, data-driven campaign including advertising, earned media, and partner outreach. Paid tactics included television, radio, newspaper, out-of-home, and entertainment streaming on channels including Pandora, Hulu, and Spotify. OHCA worked with Oklahoma City-based design agency Ghost on the creative and media buy. OHCA's communications team complemented advertising by leveraging the agency's organic social media channels, website, and pitching earned media stories to key news outlets across the state. They also utilized Peachjar, a virtual communications platform, to share electronic flyers with schools.

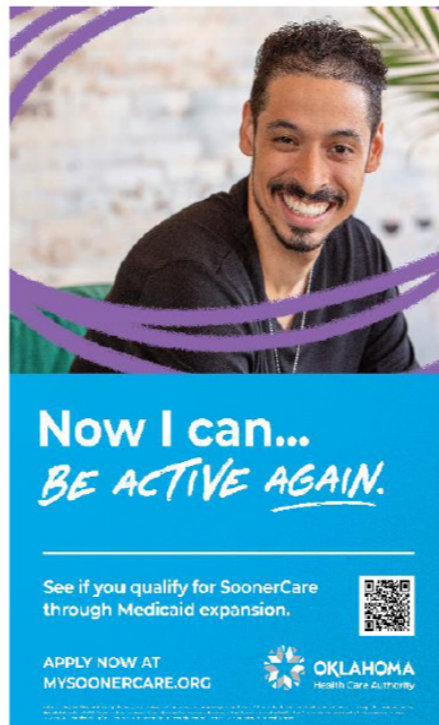
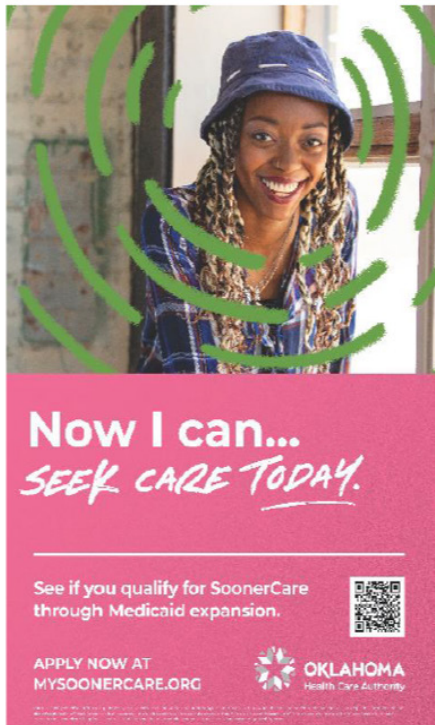
Campaign assets featured photography and **unscripted video testimonials** from newly eligible and newly enrolled Oklahomans. Creative materials featured taglines generated through interviews and conversations with the enrollees featured. Creative materials for the campaign also highlighted Oklahomans who showcase the diversity of SoonerCare members, and their healthcare needs, while also combatting stigmas surrounding Medicaid.

For the second phase of outreach, the campaign focused on the 10 counties with the lowest number of newly eligible Oklahomans enrolled in SoonerCare. Based on the audience demographics, the creative materials transitioned to new images, individual stories, and a new color palette specifically intended to resonate with and represent eligible Oklahomans in rural communities. The media buy also shifted from statewide to community newspapers, smaller radio stations, targeted television markets, and social media to focus resources where enrollment uptake lagged in those areas.

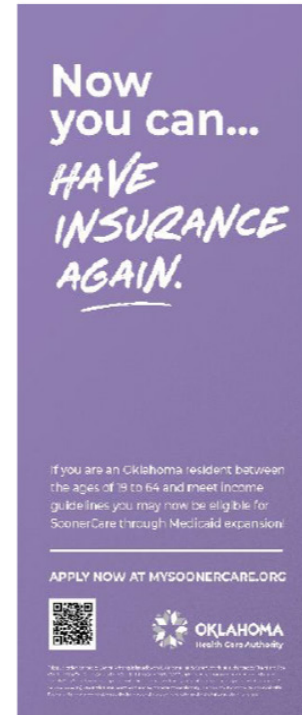
Below are examples of key messages, creative assets, and examples of social posts featuring taglines from interviews with newly enrolled Oklahomans, from phase one of the campaign:

- **Key Messages and Creative Assets:**

### 11x17 Posters



### 4x9 Rack Cards



• **Examples of Social Posts:**

 **Oklahoma Health Care Authority**  @ok\_hca · Mar 24, 2022 ...  
We have helped more than one million Oklahomans gain access to healthcare. If you are one of them, we want to hear your story. Submit it here [➔ bit.ly/3w5cF7U](https://bit.ly/3w5cF7U)

#Medicaid #SoonerCare



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 **Oklahoma Health Care Authority**  @ok\_hca · Dec 3, 2021 ...  
A little #FeelGoodFriday to help ease us into the weekend. ✨

Do you know a SoonerCare member with a story to tell? Tell them to share SoonerCare has made an impact in their life! [➔ bit.ly/3w5cF7U](https://bit.ly/3w5cF7U)



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• **Social Post With Video Featuring a Newly Enrolled Oklahoman**

## **Partners and Stakeholders**

A key element of the campaign was stakeholder engagement. Recognizing the trusted role that health providers and community organizations play in the lives of newly eligible individuals, OHCA partnered with these entities to distribute campaign collateral and provide in-person application assistance. The agency also pursued speaking opportunities and events with community partners who had close relationships with eligible individuals. For example, OHCA partnered with local high schools to conduct outreach at high school sporting events, including football games; local churches to help share outreach materials with their congregations; and the University of Oklahoma Athletics Department to promote expansion at sporting events. OHCA also provided state legislators with enrollment information to include in constituent newsletters and communications.

## **Measuring Results**

From July 1, 2021, to September 30, 2021, the campaign garnered more than 3.6 million impressions in paid digital advertising and 5,646 media exposures. Of the 200,000 eligible Oklahomans, the team hoped to enroll half (110,000) in the first three months. By September 30, 2022, 183,137 individuals had successfully enrolled in Medicaid, surpassing that goal by more than 73,000 people. During the second phase of the campaign, from February 22, 2022, to April 17, 2022, OHCA successfully increased enrollment in nine out of 10 targeted counties.

## **Conclusion**

The Medicaid Expansion outreach and education campaign in Oklahoma contributed significantly to the state's overall enrollment success and has garnered national recognition. The campaign won the National Association of Government Communicators' 2022 Blue Pencil & Gold Screen Award of Excellence for their efforts in educating Oklahomans about Medicaid Expansion. The Oklahoma City Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America named OHCA their Communications Team of the Year for the government category. OHCA's campaign can serve as a model for implementation efforts in other late expansion states to include a robust outreach and education component.

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#### ABOUT THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is committed to improving health and health equity in the United States. In partnership with others, we are working to develop a Culture of Health rooted in equity that provides every individual with a fair and just opportunity to thrive, no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they have.

Health is more than an absence of disease. It is a state of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. It reflects what takes place in our communities, where we live and work, where our children learn and play, and where we gather to worship. That is why RWJF focuses on identifying, illuminating, and addressing the barriers to health caused by structural racism and other forms of discrimination, including sexism, ableism, and prejudice based on sexual orientation.

We lean on evidence to advance health equity. We cultivate leaders who work individually and collectively across sectors to address health equity. We promote policies, practices, and systems-change to dismantle the structural barriers to wellbeing created by racism. And we work to amplify voices to shift national conversations and attitudes about health and health equity.

Through our efforts, and the efforts of others, we will continue to strive toward a Culture of Health that benefits all. It is our legacy, it is our calling, and it is our honor.

For more information, visit [www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org).

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#### ABOUT STATE HEALTH AND VALUE STRATEGIES—PRINCETON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

State Health and Value Strategies (SHVS) assists states in their efforts to transform health and healthcare by providing targeted technical assistance to state officials and agencies. The program is a grantee of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, led by staff at Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs. The program connects states with experts and peers to undertake healthcare transformation initiatives. By engaging state officials, the program provides lessons learned, highlights successful strategies and brings together states with experts in the field. Learn more at [www.shvs.org](http://www.shvs.org).

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#### ABOUT GMMB

This brief was prepared by Julie Bataille and Kevin Caudill. GMMB is a full-service communications firm dedicated to creating real and lasting positive change in the world. We work across the healthcare sector and have expertise developing communications at the intersection of policy development and program implementation. For more than 30 years, we have been on the front line of issue-based communications, earning a reputation for shaping public opinion by developing research-based communications strategies that achieve real results. Our work has helped enroll millions of individuals in affordable health coverage and increased access to needed care and services.

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#### ABOUT OKLAHOMA HEALTH CARE AUTHORITY

This brief was prepared by OHCA staff members Melissa Richey and Laura Wilcox. OHCA administers Oklahoma's Medicaid program, commonly known as SoonerCare. SoonerCare works to improve the health of qualified Oklahomans by ensuring medically necessary benefits and services are available. Qualifying Oklahomans include certain low-income children, adults, families, those with disabilities, those being treated for breast or cervical cancer and those seeking family planning services.