

Abstract:

Pursuant to the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 passed in February of 2006, new and renewal applicants to Medicaid, the nation's public health insurance program for the poor and uninsured, must provide original documentation proving their identity and United States citizenship status. While this new mandate may seem simple on the surface, the myriad of elements required from key stakeholders at the state and local levels means that implementation may not take place as intended by federal officials. Consequently, the purpose of this thesis is to conduct an in-depth case study of Massachusetts to understand how successfully the new documentation of citizenship and identity requirement is being implemented. Through extensive qualitative data gathered from field interviews, document analysis, and observation of public meetings, the experiences of Massachusetts Medicaid officials, enrollment workers, and community-based organizations in implementing the new requirement are covered in great detail and analyzed through the contexts of the top-down and bottom-up approaches to implementation. The top-down approach assumes high-level policymakers as central actors in implementation, whereas the bottom up approach posits that the closer one is to street-level, the greater one's influence is in determining how effective implementation can be achieved. Results indicate that the State of Massachusetts has implemented the documentation requirement relatively successfully vis-à-vis the objectives of the statute and its implementing rules and regulations. However, this compliance has only been possible with integral bottom-up influence from community-based organizations and enrollment workers where top-down influence has been insufficient in clearly articulating what is expected of the Massachusetts Medicaid agency. The Massachusetts case indicates that there is a need to approach implementation neither with a pure top-down or bottom-up mentality, but rather with the realization that a genuine partnership must be created among all potentially influential actors in the implementation chain. Ultimately, implementation should be viewed as a model of interdependency where each actor's expertise and limitations are identified, thereby leading to more successful implementation structures.