


# Families USA Receives \$1 Million Grant to Tell Pro-ObamaCare Stories

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By Alex Rogers

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Families USA has received a \$1 million grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which it will use to collect and distribute to the media personal stories of those who have benefited from the new health insurance exchange rolled out by the Obama Administration October 1. The announcement is good news for the President, who has been widely criticized for the horrible launch of the online marketplace [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov).

“The purpose is to bridge the information gap for people who can significantly benefit from the Affordable Care Act,” Ron Pollack, the Executive Director of Families USA, tells TIME. “Too many people who can benefit enormously are unaware of it.”

Families USA, a national nonpartisan nonprofit organization that calls itself “The Voice for Health Care Consumers,” has been helping journalists find health care stories for decades. They found stories before the ACA was enacted in 2010 to show how the bill could prove beneficial, and have since collected stories of beneficiaries, like the young adult who can now stay on their parents’ health care plan and the consumer with a pre-existing condition who now can buy insurance.

The unsolicited donation will “significantly expand” the story bank, which is already over 950 strong, Pollack says, and allow the organization and its partner GMMB, a communications firm, to hire six new positions in Washington, DC. Pollack says that Families USA will be providing new stories for the media and others who are interested “before the month is over.” “We have a bunch of stories that are in the hopper for vetting,” adds Pollack.

Only in recent months has the insurance exchange registered on the American public’s radar. In early September, barely half (51%) knew that exchanges were going to be available in their state; that has risen to nearly two-thirds (65%), according to a Pew poll



Jim Young / Reuters

Senate Majority leader Harry Reid (D-NV) signs a copy of the bill for Ron Pollack after the Senate approved a package of changes to President Barack Obama’s landmark healthcare overhaul and sent the bill to the House of Representatives for final passage in Washington, March 25, 2010.

released this week. The cost of the website is also unknown: reports have suggested that the cost to taxpayers is anywhere from \$70 million to over \$350 million.

What is known is that the website's software has had serious problems, from failing to properly set up user accounts to sending duplicate enrollee information to health insurers. The Obama Administration said Wednesday night that it will give Americans who buy health insurance through the new online marketplace an extra six weeks to obtain coverage before they incur a penalty, which is \$95 per adult, or 1% of family income, whichever is greater. Those who buy coverage through the exchange will have until March 31, instead of February 15, to sign up for a plan.

Contractors who helped build and service healthcare.gov were grilled Thursday before a House committee. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius will testify October 30 before the same House panel.

The federally run health exchange has been criticized for more than just the website. On Thursday the New York Times ran a front-page story on how the exchanges are not encouraging competition in rural areas, leading to the Affordable Care Act's uneven effect on the cost of insurance premiums. Earlier in the week the Washington Post ran a front-page story on how the network of nonprofit insurance companies, also created to foster competition and lower costs, was in trouble in part due to a lack of government funding.

But for now, Pollack and the media are mostly focused on the tarnished website.

"Hopefully when it gets fixed we'll have a whole lot more stories to vet," said Pollack, who has talked with officials from the White House and HHS, including Secretary Sebelius, about the rollout. "The pool of people that we can work with is smaller than it otherwise would be, but we're expecting that will grow significantly in the weeks ahead" as the problems are fixed, said Pollack.