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EVERYONE NEEDS AN ADVOCATE

By Amy Steinbrech

Photos courtesy of Utah Health Policy Project



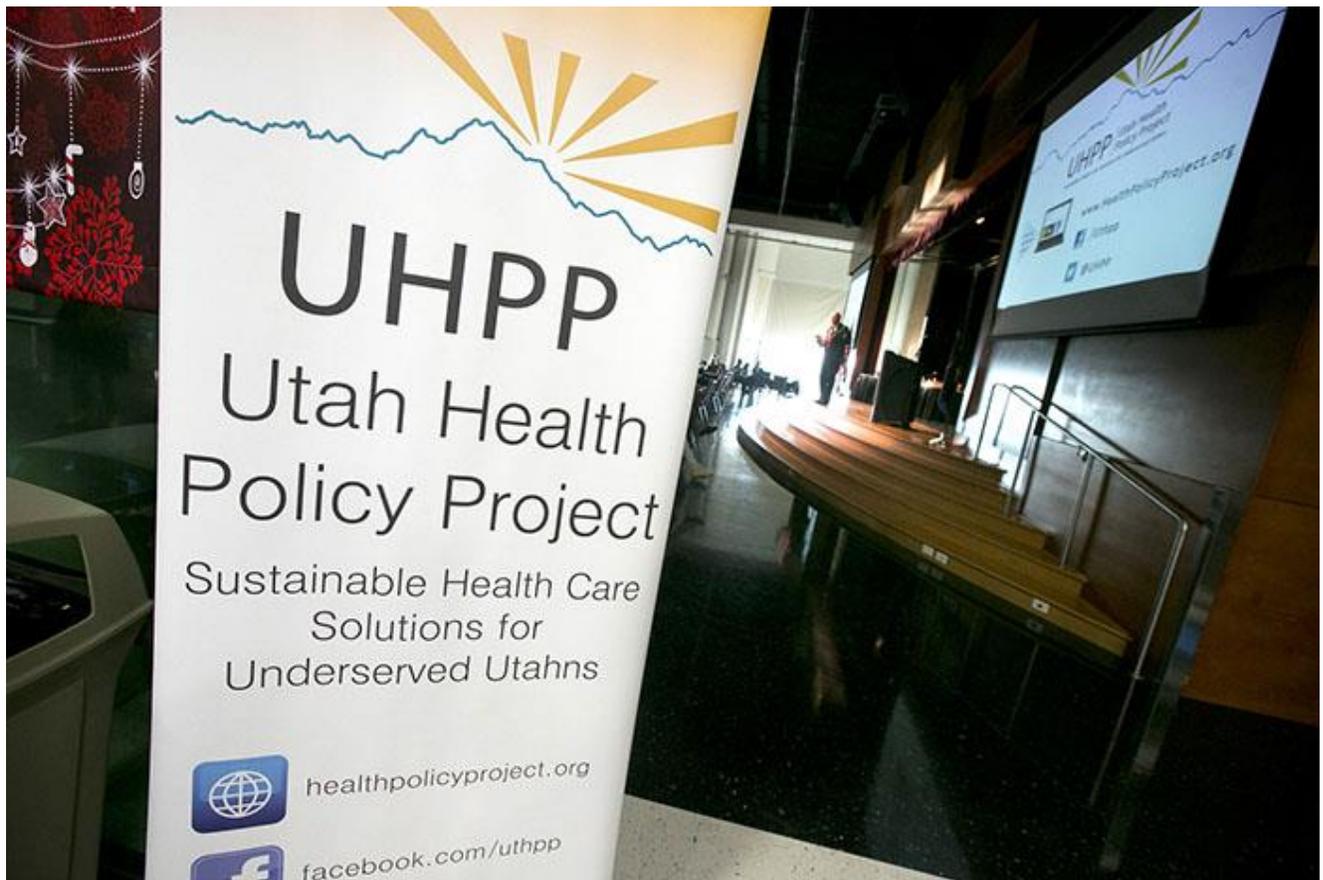
Matt Slonaker (front center) and the UHPP team

UTAH HEALTH POLICY PROJECT

Matt Slonaker, executive director for the Utah Health Policy Project, and his team are on the front lines of health care reform. UHPP's mission is to create a health care system that provides access to higher quality health care at a lower cost while ensuring the consumer's voice is heard. It does this by bringing political and business leaders to the same table and encouraging collaborative dialogue to find effective long-term solutions.

For more than a decade, UHPP has carved out a niche as Utah's most informed and reliable expert on health care reform. Working directly with consumers, they understand the needs and struggles of the low-income families and individuals they represent.

"Having consumer input helps inform our decisions and that's what sets us apart from other health research and policy organizations. The consumer's point of view is always front and center," Slonaker says.



UHPP separates its work into four categories:

Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program Policy

The CHIP program offers low-cost insurance to children, and Medicaid provides health insurance to low-income Utahns (adults and children) who have a categorical requirement such as being pregnant, blind or disabled. “These are really important public programs that benefit some of Utah’s most vulnerable health care consumers. This is why we focus much of our policy efforts on improving these programs,” Slonaker says.

Affordable Care Act and Health Insurance Marketplace Policy

UHPP provides fair, accurate and impartial information on the Affordable Care Act. In this arena, UHPP’s work is two-fold. It focuses on policy, promoting programs and regulations that benefit Utah’s underserved, and it works to ensure Utahns understand their options in the federal insurance marketplace. Take Care Utah is responsible for making sure Utahns understand their options under the ACA.

“It is common with these types of programs to let politics get in the way. We boil it down and make sure people understand what may work for them,” Slonaker says. Through its outreach efforts, Take Care Utah helped tens of thousands of Utahns with

their questions and applications. More than 175,000 Utahns selected an insurance plan through healthcare.gov by the end of January 2016.

Enrollment Assistance

UHPP works in collaboration with its lead team partners, the Association for Community Health and United Way Salt Lake 211. Enrollment activities are performed under the Take Care Utah umbrella, one-stop-shop for Utahns looking for health insurance. Those who need free assistance with Medicaid or CHIP applications, or with the Affordable Care Act, can call 211 or go to takecareutah.com and enter their ZIP code to find an enrollment assister.

“We are fortunate in Utah to have a statewide network,” Slonaker says. A number of Utah community service organizations partner together, which enables greater enrollment success in Utah. In fact, last year Utah posted the second-highest enrollment growth in the nation.

Public Outreach and Education

True to its mission, UHPP works to understand what consumers really want out of the health care system. “It is a two-way street,” Slonaker says. “We work with our community partners and hear from our consumers to better understand what real people need.” UHPP seeks out organizations like Rotary Clubs and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and works with them to get a better feel for what is going on in the community. UHPP reached out to more than 7,500 Utahns through their participation in 178 community events last year.

UHPP employees are living and breathing the nonprofit spirit of Utah.

For additional information about the Utah Health Policy Project visit healthpolicyproject.org or call 801-433-2299.

