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OHIO HEALTH CARE NAVIGATORS LEFT WITH NO CONTRACT, NO ANSWERS
Funding for final year of three-year grant has not arrived

COLUMBUS – The Ohio Association of Foodbanks has led a statewide consortium, including nine regional and local nonprofit organizations, to carry out Ohio’s largest federal Navigator program for four consecutive years. During that time, the association and its consortium has nearly met, met, or exceeded all of the goals it set out for itself – goals which grew more ambitious with each year.

“Since 2013, nearly 1 million Ohioans have gained health care coverage through the Affordable Care Act as a result of the federal Marketplace and the expansion of Medicaid,” said Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. “This can only be seen as an overwhelming success, and we’ve been proud to be a part of that success.”

The association received an invitation to apply for the third year of its three-year grant on May 2, at the same funding level as year two. As [stated in that invitation](#), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) expanded the Navigator project period from 12 to 36 months, beginning in 2015, “in an effort to provide greater consistency for Navigator grantee organizations and their staff from year to year.”

Yet, the Trump Administration made an eleventh-hour announcement on Thursday, August 31 that it would be cutting Navigator grant funding by 41 percent. Grantees received a [bulletin](#) indicating cuts would be made, but providing no expectation about when grant contracts or funding amounts would be issued. The previous year’s contract ended September 1, and since then, navigator grantees like the association have been left without answers or information.

“Our consortium is made up of community-based nonprofits, with Navigator personnel funded by this federal program,” said Hamler-Fugitt. “These Navigators are doing yeoman’s work, providing enrollment assistance on evenings and weekends, traveling to many counties to outreach to vulnerable people throughout our state. Now, we’ve had to inform these nonprofits that we have no information, no official guidance, no contract, and no funding. On top of that, consumers across Ohio will likely have nowhere to turn, and we will lose the momentum we’ve gained approaching the new open enrollment period. This is an unimaginable and heartbreaking situation. It’s unconscionable.”

Hamler-Fugitt stressed that Ohio’s consumers need leadership from their elected officials on this extremely time-sensitive issue.

“It’s now time for Ohio’s congressional delegation to demand that the Administration act quickly to restore this critical funding and keep Navigator services accessible for Ohio consumers. Now is not the time to play games with the health coverage of millions of Ohioans.”

About the Ohio Association of Foodbanks

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is Ohio’s largest charitable response to hunger, representing Ohio’s 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,300 member charities including food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. In SFY 2016, the association and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute over 208 million pounds of food and grocery items. The association also serves as the home of The Ohio Benefit Bank and operates the state’s largest navigator program for the Affordable Care Act. Follow the association on [Twitter](#), stay connected on [Facebook](#) and visit them on the web at www.ohiofoodbanks.org.

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