10 YEARS, 10 WINS

A decade of impact for Georgia health care consumers
Dear friends,

Georgians for a Healthy Future was founded in 2008 after a group of dedicated health advocates came together through a shared recognition that Georgia’s health care consumers needed a strong, united voice in the public policy making process. Ten years later, here we stand looking back at the ups and downs of our first decade and sharing hopes for the coming years.

In the time we’ve spent compiling this report, I have found my heart humbled, happy, proud, and full. It was instructive and inspiring to inventory our efforts and review our successes, in some cases, years after the hard work was complete. More than that, it was extraordinary to recognize the innumerable consumers, coalition partners, board members, donors, and policy makers—many of you—who worked alongside us to realize these achievements.

I hope that you find the accomplishments recorded here energizing and heartening. These are just GHF’s first steps; we have much more to do to ensure a healthy, equitable future for all Georgians. I invite you to join us in celebrating the work of GHF’s inaugural decade and hope that we can count on your partnership and support to foster the healthy future that Georgia deserves.

Sincerely,

Laura Colbert
Executive Director

In 2008, Georgians for a Healthy Future is established as Georgia’s first advocacy organization focused solely on consumer health, health care, and coverage.
“Our mission is to build a unified voice, vision, and leadership to achieve a healthy future for all Georgians.”

October 2009

A coalition of health advocates came together to create Georgians for a Healthy Future after expressing a shared desire for an organization that works for the health of all Georgia consumers, with a focus on the most vulnerable.

The first board of directors incorporated Georgians for a Healthy Future in 2008 and an official launch event was held at the state capitol in October 2009.
Governor Nathan Deal signs HB 1166 in May 2012

As a result of Georgians for a Healthy Future’s leadership, Georgia’s General Assembly and Governor Deal passed a law in 2012 that restored health insurance coverage to Georgia children.
Prior to the passage of HB 1166, health insurers in Georgia had stopped offering plans that covered only children because they were required to offer coverage to all children regardless of pre-existing conditions.

HB 1166 restored child-only plans to the Georgia health insurance market so that families could insure their children ahead of the full implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

GHF worked closely with Representative Atwood and led a coalition of child and health advocates to ensure successful passage of the legislation.

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**12**

**HOUSE BILL 1166**

**SENATE: YEA 41, NAY 2**

**HOUSE: YEA 161, NAY 1**

To amend Title 33 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to insurance, so as to

1. provide for individual health insurance coverage to children through child-only health policies; to provide for legislative intent; to establish a mandatory, uniform open enrollment period; to provide for definitions; to provide for guaranteed-issue coverage regardless of health status; to provide for special enrollment periods for loss of coverage because of a qualifying event; to provide for a list of qualifying events; to provide effective dates for coverage purchased during an open enrollment period or after a qualifying event; to provide notice and marketing requirements; to provide for rules and regulations; to provide for an automatic repeater; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

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**A BILL TO BE ENTITLED**

**AN ACT**

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**SECTION 1.**

To amend Title 33 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to insurance, so as to...
Since 2012, Georgians for a Healthy Future has led the Cover Georgia coalition, an education and advocacy campaign boasting dozens of partners working to expand Medicaid in Georgia. The coalition’s efforts have kept Medicaid expansion a relevant and pressing issue in public policy discussions.
In 2013, GHF collected more than 10,000 signatures, postcards, and petitions in support of extending health insurance to low-income Georgians, and delivered them to Georgia’s Governor and state legislators.

GHF staff have traveled to dozens of communities in every region of the state to talk to community groups, people in the coverage gap, health care providers, and others about Medicaid expansion and the importance of continued advocacy in Georgia.

GHF staff regularly collect and share stories from Georgians stuck in the coverage gap—people like Susie.

Susie is the primary caretaker for her granddaughter, but she falls in Georgia’s coverage gap leaving her unable to care for herself. Susie has cancer and several other chronic diseases. One sympathetic doctor has allowed her to make small monthly payments towards her cancer treatment, but her other conditions go untreated. Susie and her husband have separated because of stress brought on by unpaid medical bills.

In March 2018, as a result of grassroots activism and sustained advocacy led by GHF, the Georgia House of Representatives held its first public hearing on legislation that would close Georgia’s coverage gap.
Bharat and his wife Shakuntala are asylum seekers originally from Nepal. GHF assisted the couple and their children through the enrollment process. GHF also connected the family to a refugee and asylum service organization and helped set up their daughter’s Medicaid application appointment.

“This saves me a lot of money and now I have a more flexible plan than last year.” GHF’s enrollment assister helped Michele re-enroll in Marketplace coverage for 2016. He chose a new plan and identified local primary care providers that were in his coverage network.

Georgians for a Healthy Future directly enrolled more than 3,000 consumers.

Michele Rimanelli

“I did not have health insurance for 10 years. For many farmers like me health insurance is a big issue. I’m glad I have it now through the Affordable Care Act.” Brent is a small, independent farmer. When he got covered, Brent was healthy but wanted insurance for emergency situations and to ensure he could continue doing the physical labor of farming.

Georgians for a Healthy Future has helped lower Georgia’s uninsured rate from 18.5% in 2012 to 12.8% in 2016, by assisting consumers to enroll in and use their health insurance coverage.

Enrollment assister Pranay Rana assists a consumer with health insurance enrollment.
In 2013, GHF helped to establish a consortium of 15 partner organizations, which was awarded a federal grant to educate and assist consumers with health insurance enrollment. 316,543 Georgians enrolled in health coverage in the first year.

GHF employed an enrollment assister from 2013 to 2016 and, in that time, GHF directly enrolled more than 3,000 consumers.

GEAR NETWORK
In 2015, GHF built and grew the Georgia Enrollment Assister Resource (GEAR) Network, a program to provide technical assistance, consumer resources, and continuing education opportunities to Georgia’s enrollment assisters.

Beginning in 2015, GHF releases an annual Getting Georgia Covered report highlighting consumer experiences in the ACA Marketplace, best practices and lessons learned from enrollment assistants, and policy recommendations after each year’s open enrollment period. These annual reports are the only publications that capture the Georgia consumer experience in the Health Insurance Marketplace year over year.

Through the GEAR Network, GHF produced the Get Insured. Stay Insured. toolkit and the My Health Insurance User’s Manual, to help consumers understand and use their health insurance. These tools reached more than 4000 Georgia consumers in the two years after their release.

In October 2016, GHF released Collaborating For Consumers, a paper highlighting opportunities for advocates, enrollment assistants, and direct service providers to work together to improve coverage and access to care for the people they serve.

GEORGIANS FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE
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Georgians for a Healthy Future has testified or presented to legislative and study committees, national advisory groups, and state decision-making bodies on behalf of Georgia consumers on more than 100 occasions.

Executive Director Laura Colbert discusses consumer health issues with state Representative Sam Park in February 2018.
Georgians for a Healthy Future offers policy makers a unique, constructive perspective informed by stories collected from Georgia consumers and evidence-based policy analysis.

In February 2011, Governor Deal appointed GHF’s Executive Director to the Governor’s Health Insurance Exchange Advisory Committee. GHF’s Executive Director brought consumer-focused recommendations and communicated the needs of real Georgia consumers to the committee.

Also in 2011, GHF released *Building Georgia’s Health Insurance Exchange: An Affordable Pathway to Health Insurance*, which explained the health insurance exchange concept and made recommendations for a consumer-friendly exchange. The report was widely distributed to and well received by stakeholders, advocates, and policymakers.

Since 2013, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) has annually appointed Georgians for a Healthy Future’s Executive Director as a consumer representative. NAIC consumer representatives ensure that the consumers are considered and prioritized in national conversations about health insurance oversight and regulation, often influencing state actions that impact consumer coverage.

GHF’s Executive Director was appointed in 2015 as one of the non-legislative members to the Senate Study Committee on the Consumer and Provider Protection Act, which aimed to understand how the existing insurance environment affects consumers’ access to care. As a result of GHF’s involvement, the committee issued a recommendation to examine how to better ensure Georgia consumers have adequate access to care within insurance provider networks.
Georgians for a Healthy Future is the voice for Georgia health care consumers. Our mission is to build a unified voice, vision, and leadership to achieve a healthy future for all Georgians. We utilize strong partnerships, sound research, and effective consumer outreach and education to ensure all Georgians have access to the quality, affordable health care they need to live healthy lives and contribute to the health of their communities.
As a result of advocacy by Georgians for a Healthy Future and a coalition of health advocates, the Georgia General Assembly and Governor Deal approved legislation in 2016 that required insurance companies to publish accurate, accessible, and updated provider directories for use by Georgia consumers.
GHF brought the issue of inaccurate provider directories (the list of doctors and facilities in an insurance plan’s network) to the attention of state Senator P.K. Martin after consumer stories and interviews with enrollment assistants revealed that the directories were a primary tool that Georgians used to select an insurance plan and that many were being misled by out-of-date and inaccurate information.

To inform the legislature’s consideration of SB 302, championed by Senator Martin, GHF performed a secret shopper study to demonstrate the prevalence of inaccurate provider directories and how those inaccuracies prevented consumers from accessing needed health care.

GHF released a policy report titled, *Ensuring Access to Care: Improving Provider Directory Accuracy and Usability* that described Georgia’s existing provider directory provisions, outlined policies adopted by other states, and recommended policy changes to improve directory accuracy and usability for consumers.

Governor Deal signs SB 302 in May 2016.

Senator Martin and GHF team member Andy Lord celebrate the final legislative vote on SB 302.
Georgians for a Healthy Future convened the Protect Our Care Georgia coalition in February 2017, and along with similar coalitions across the country, defeated Congressional efforts to dismantle Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act.
The Protect Our Care Georgia coalition brought together almost 40 partners to defend against Congressional threats to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act through public education and outreach, policy analysis, and engagement with public policy makers.

In less than a year, GHF traveled to more than 30 communities across the state to raise awareness about the proposed dismantling of consumer health protections and health coverage.

Through GHF’s outreach, thousands of Georgians called and emailed their Congressional leaders to share their health care stories and express support for Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act.

GHF highlighted the stories of real Georgians who were covered by Medicaid or through the Affordable Care Act via social media and in 46 interviews with local and state media outlets.

(right) Anthony and Nicholas are covered by Georgia’s Medicaid program
Thousands of Georgians are better equipped to navigate the health care system, use their coverage, and engage in public policy debates that will impact their health as a result of Georgians for a Healthy Future’s community outreach efforts.
In 2010, Georgians for a Healthy Future joined with the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, Voices for Georgia’s Children, and AARP to present a series of educational forums and workshops across Georgia. The series, Health Care 2010 and Beyond, reached dozens of Georgians in Savannah, Athens, Rome, Butler, Macon, and Tifton.

GHF partnered with the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities in 2018 to educate Georgians about the state’s Medicaid program. The “Georgia Voices for Medicaid” program offers training to communities across the state about how Medicaid benefits their children, neighbors, schools, and health care providers. The trainings have reached dozens of individuals to date.

GHF interacted with dozens of consumers in 2009. Since then, the organization has reached many more individuals and families each year. Through in-person outreach, community partnerships, and digital communications, GHF will touch more than 15,000 Georgians in 2018.

In 2017, GHF began a new partnership with the Southwest Georgia Project in Albany, Georgia to provide information and resources about access to health care and health advocacy to small farmers, childcare workers, and community members in rural, southwest Georgia.

In 2017, GHF staff member discusses health care advocacy with a group of Cobb County residents in 2017.

GHF, together with Georgia Equality and The Health Initiative, have helped to educate LGBT+ Georgians about how health policy changes may impact their health care or coverage and informed them of their rights and protections when enrolling and using their health insurance. In 2015, when a U.S. Supreme Court decision granted marriage equality, GHF ran a media campaign aimed at LGBT couples about the opportunity to enroll in health insurance after getting married.

GHF, through the My Health Resource Guide, helps consumers to navigate the often opaque and complicated health care, insurance, and social services systems. GHF annually produces A Consumer Health Advocate’s Guide to the Georgia Legislative Session, a booklet that serves as a compass to the state Capitol for grassroots health advocates. The publication is distributed to hundreds of Georgians annually.

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Georgians for a Healthy Future has published more than 20 research and policy analyses and hosted dozens of policy forums to inform the debates and decisions made by Georgia’s policy makers.
Each year at the beginning of the state legislative session, Georgians for a Healthy Future hosts Health Care Unscrambled, a legislative breakfast event that features a bipartisan panel of legislators and a keynote address from a nationally recognized health policy expert. The event highlights pressing issues faced by Georgia’s health care consumers.

IN JANUARY 2012
Georgians for a Healthy Future and Voices for Georgia’s Children jointly released Modernizing Medicaid and PeachCare: Promising Program Design Options for Georgia’s Children, which highlighted best practices and made recommendations to strengthen Georgia’s Medicaid and PeachCare programs.

IN DECEMBER 2014
GHF hosted Health Beyond Healthcare and released a similarly named paper that highlighted the importance of addressing the social determinants of health in order to improve health outcomes and address health disparities in Georgia. The policy forum and paper described promising practices and advocacy opportunities in the housing, education, criminal justice reform, and transportation sectors that could significantly improve the health of Georgians.

IN NOVEMBER 2016
GHF, Georgia Equality, and The Health Initiative co-released Voices for Equity: How the experiences of transgender Georgians can inform the implementation of nondiscrimination provisions in the Affordable Care Act, a policy paper that described the discriminatory experiences of transgender Georgians and outlined policy recommendations for federal and state policymakers, health care systems and providers, and health advocates. The paper was provided to federal policymakers in advance of policy changes made to non-discrimination protections for consumers.

IN SEPTEMBER 2017
GHF, Georgia Equality, and The Health Initiative co-released Health Beyond Healthcare and Strengthening Georgia’s Rural Hospitals and Increasing Access to Care: Recommendations from Georgia consumer and community groups. The report was submitted to the legislature’s Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee for its consideration in conjunction with testimony offered by seven partner organizations that supported the report’s recommendations.
Together with the Georgia Council on Substance Abuse, Georgians for a Healthy Future successfully advocated for a change to Georgia’s Medicaid program in 2017 that is expected to result in verbal substance use screenings for 145,000 Georgia youth annually, along with counseling sessions as needed.
The Medicaid policy change incentivizes health care providers to verbally screen youth for risky substance use behaviors, and to counsel them based on the screening results. This evidence-based, public health approach is called Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT).

Because Medicaid covers half of Georgia’s children, this change significantly increases access to screening and counseling services for young people, especially among those in low-income families. The policy change is expected to result in the verbal screening of 145,000 Georgia youth annually when fully implemented.

GHF and the Georgia Council on Substance Abuse kicked off the public conversation about SBIRT in 2015 with the release of Somebody Finally Asked Me: A Public Health Approach to Preventing Youth Substance Use Disorders, a report featuring policy recommendations to help prevent substance use disorders among Georgia’s youth.