

THE UTAH HEALTH POLICY PROJECT
HEALTH MATTERS

on the Hill...



Utah Health Matters E-Newsletter: Special Pre-Session Edition
Today: **January 15, 2008**

Greetings Health Advocates:

Welcome back to the *People's House*! Shine your shoes, press your pants, get ready to step into our sparkly, fully renovated Capitol Rotunda. The session officially begins in 1 week, on Monday, January 21, though the first day, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday, is largely ceremonial. Depending on how we play it, this could be a breakthrough year for health policy on Medicaid and the uninsured. Broad health system reform and proposals to improve and restore Medicaid and CHIP will all be in the center ring.

We have set up a special webpage to keep you up to date on the latest legislative developments and what you can do to get involved from week to week. It includes a new [Health Action Calendar](#) with important dates and deadlines for policymakers and coalitions.

Also, from now until the end of the session we will send you weekly [Health Matters on the Hill](#) and [Health Bill Tracker](#) updates as we work to realize our mission: quality, comprehensive, affordable health care coverage for all Utahns.

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1. Tools and Tips to Make the Most of the '08 Legislative Session

[Vote Tracker Tool](#): To track votes and results from your conversations with legislators, check out our handy 2008 spreadsheet of legislators and contact information. Click [here](#) to download in Excel.

[UHPP's Health Bill Tracker](#): The team at UHPP will do our best to keep track of the many health-related bills this Session. Click here for our pre-Session edition of our ever

popular [Health Bill Tracker](#). Please note: new bills are coming out every day—including some of our own. We will send out an updated *Tracker* this Friday. This tool will also be updated weekly.

[Overview of Issues for 2008 Legislative Session](#): No matter what issues you care about, it's always helpful to know what key general issues the legislators will be considering in the Session. The Office of Legislative Research and General has done a wonderful job summarizing these issues from Interim Committee discussions over the year in 3-pages: <http://le.utah.gov/session/2008/pdfdoc/2008keyissues.pdf>

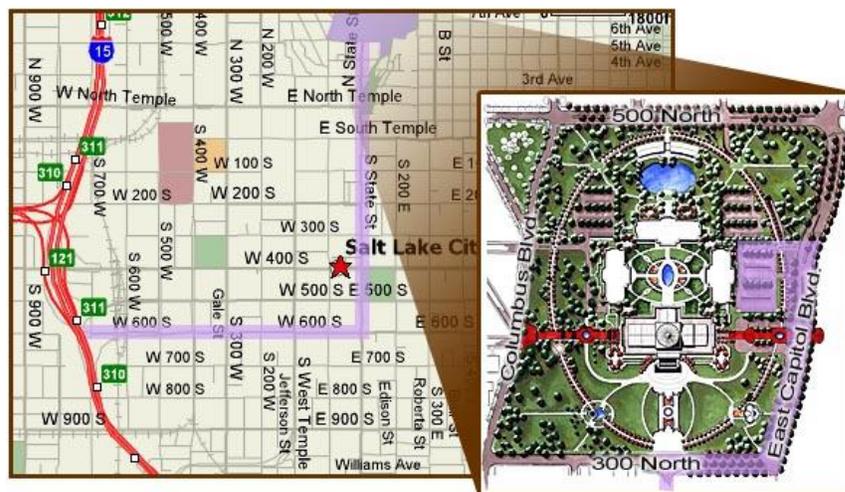
Call Your Legislator Cheat Sheet:

Click [here](#) to download a fun to use 'cheat sheet' of important phone numbers to use during the legislative session, including the toll free numbers.

Getting to the Utah State Capitol

If you are downtown, the Bus is a great option to get up to the Hill. Route 500 will take you right to the East Building's front door! The Capitol is in the Downtown Free Zone (!) and buses run every 15 minutes. [You can find a schedule \(with pickup locations\) here.](#)

Driving from outside of Salt Lake: simply take I-15 (either north or south) to the 600 South exit and head east on 600 South. Turn left on State Street and head up the hill to the State Capitol. See map and follow route highlighted in purple. Be sure to allow plenty of time to drive from the freeway through the city. Because Salt Lake City is experiencing unprecedented construction activity, you may experience traffic delays in your travels.



Where to park?

Parking at the Capitol should be somewhat improved this session. There are two parking lots available to the public. The largest is on the NE Corner of the Capitol Complex. The second lot is right next to East Building (Now also know as the Senate Building). In addition, the 450 construction workers that have been at the Capitol the past few sessions are largely gone. Thus there should much more street parking available to the public this year. If you must drive, your best bet is to carpool and arrive

early.

2. Governor's Budget Contains Strong Commitment to Medicaid & CHIP

Released last month, Governor Huntsman's budget reflects a strong commitment to health & human service needs and to bold health system reforms. It provides funding for dental services, increases Medicaid provider rates, and fully funds Utah's CHIP program with ongoing money. It also has a \$30 million 'down payment' on the health system reforms. We learned that most of this is intended for a planned expansion of the Utah Premium Partnership program.

- Medicaid Provider Rates: \$18 million
Medicaid enrollees' difficulty finding providers who will see Medicaid patients is probably related to inadequate Medicaid provider rates. To address this growing problem, Governor Huntsman recommends that provider rates be increased substantially. While not eliminating all the access problems that Medicaid recipients face (Utah still needs more Doctors, Nurses, and other Primary Care Providers!), this increase will help many more Utahns receive cost-effective primary care.
- Full Funding for CHIP
CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) is one of Governor Huntsman's top priorities and a critical piece of his commitment to cover the uninsured. Last year the legislature increased CHIP funding by only \$2 million in ongoing money. The rest of the program was funded by dipping into the Tobacco Settlement Trust Fund surplus. This was a one-time option. The Governor rightly asks that CHIP be funded with ongoing money this year.
- Adult Medicaid Dental
Once again the Governor has asked that Adult Medicaid Dental services be restored. His budget asks for \$2.85 million in ongoing money to restore this important benefit.

Now you may be wondering, what difference does the Governor's budget really make? From our experience, quite a bit. Gov. H stands solidly behind his budget requests through the last hours of the Session. He and his team work closely with community advocates to get the job done. However, what's been clear since he took office is that he needs all of us as much as we need him.

3. Vision: What Happened and What's the Solution?

Gov. H did *not* include Medicaid vision services in his budget recommendation—but why? He and his staff are working actively behind the scenes to clean up the confusion from last year's misguided attempt to restore vision services. Last year the legislature allocated \$175,000 and approved a plan to restore vision thru a public/private partnership with Standard Optical that would have required a \$10 copay for eyeglasses.

There are several reasons why the plan failed and why the Legislature and Department of Health have not reached a solution to the problem yet:

- The copay was too expensive (Federal regulations only permit up to a \$3 copay).
- Executive Appropriations Committee decided that the copay could only be reduced through legislation and could not be approved by a legislative committee.
- The proposed private/public partnership has a significant cost because it requires an actuarial study estimated to cost \$50,000. This is nearly a 1/3 of the cost of the entire program.

What's the Solution?

Because of the administrative costs in pursuing a public/private partnership and relatively low cost of the program (approx. \$200,000). The Department of Health should be allowed to restore the benefit using funds from their existing budget (the Department has had a sufficient surplus in the last two years to do this). While philosophically this may not be the ideal solution for many legislators, allowing the department to just cover the eyeglasses makes the most economic sense.

If legislative leadership still desires to pursue a sole source, private/public partnership, we need to commit to a multi-year plan. This will allow the Department of Health the time seek the needed federal waiver and defray the \$50,000 actuarial study over several years. Unlike allowing the Department of Health to absorb the benefit in its existing budget, this solution will require new legislation.

4. New Medicaid/CHIP Quality and Simplification Initiatives

Representative Holdaway is running legislation this year with the goal of making it easier for hard-working families to enroll in Medicaid, CHIP, and UPP.

The bill (soon to be numbered) will require the Departments of Health and Workforce Services to work with the Office of Childcare and Utah's School Districts to identify uninsured children and families and help enroll them in public programs if they qualify.

The bill will also make changes to the UPP program to encourage enrollment and simplify the application process by:

- Expanding income eligibility for the program to 200% FPL. This will allow the UPP program to mirror CHIP, ending the current confusion in having two different income ranges, one for parents and another for their children.
- Defining UPP qualification a *qualifying life event* (like a marriage, divorce, or birth of a child) which will allow families to enroll for UPP and get insurance outside their employers open enrollment period.

We are excited about this legislation's potential to improve the accessibility of these important programs for Utah families.

In addition to Rep. Holdaway's bill, we are working with Sen. Greg Bell on legislation that will require every Utah Medicaid recipient to have a Medical Home. By improving Medicaid reimbursements to primary care providers to support enhanced primary care services, such as care coordination, care management, and easy access to care, the

Medical Home concept leads to increased quality and better health outcomes. The state wins too: a comprehensive Medical Home model can yield great cost savings to the system.

5. USHARE (Utahns for Sustainable Health Reform) Update

As many of you know, **U-SHARE (Utahns for Sustainable HeAlth REform)** is a coalition of organizations and individuals interested in ensuring health reform is affordable and accessible for all Utahns. As a coalition we believe health reform should reflect the goals of:

1. Containing **COST**,
2. Increasing **QUALITY** and
3. Expanding **ACCESS** to affordable, quality health care.

The U-SHARE leadership team has developed a set of principles to guide policymakers toward these goals. When these are finalized we will be reaching out to organizations and individuals to endorse the goals and principles and become a part of the coalition. But that does not mean you cannot be involved NOW. UHPP is always looking for individuals and businesses to share stories of their experience with the health care system with legislators. Additionally, talking to our legislators about the need for health reform and what we would like to see as reform moves forward must begin today. To share your story or become involved in U-SHARE contact Elizabeth Garbe at 801-433-2299 or elizabeth@healthpolicyproject.org.

In an effort to support U-SHARE's efforts, UHPP recently applied for a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *Consumer Voices for Coverage*. In November we were one of 15 states to receive a site visit. Yet, when the final decision was made Utah was not chosen as one of the ten states to receive the 3-year grant. While UHPP was disappointed with the decision, we could not be happier with the outcome of the process. As a community we rallied together, coming to consensus on the direction that Utah needs to take as we face the daunting task of reforming our health system. We want to thank all of our supporters and assure all of you that our work is not done. UHPP is committed to raising funds to support the work of U-SHARE and will forge ahead to ensure that health reform in Utah is sustainable and affordable for all Utahns. We have been encouraged to apply for the RWJ grant next year and are committed to doing so.

6. Health Reform Recommendations and Health System Reform Legislation

As the health reform debate begins, the Utah Health Policy Project is putting forward a number of ideas on how the state can set the table for true health reform. Any reform efforts must address cost, quality and access at the same time. Also, a number of changes must occur to set the stage for successful reforms. We have developed detailed recommendations in the following areas: affordability and access to care, quality and transparency, risk management and community rating, and financing through shared responsibility. Click here to [read our Recommendations \(8 pages\)](#). On Rep. Dave Clark's request, we worked with key partners to prepare written feedback on his "Health System Reform" legislation. We will be meeting with him today to discuss these recommendations.

7. Multicultural Health Network Initiatives for the 2008 Legislative Session

It will be a busy legislative session for the [Utah Multicultural Health Network](#) (hosted by Comunidades Unidas) and its systematic efforts to eliminate health disparities. Two out of the three working committees have developed legislation to move their core objectives forward.

The CLAS (Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services) Committee is working with new Rep. Rebecca Chavez-Houck on an ambitious 'omnibus' bill that will set Utah down the long, twisted path toward culturally effective health care delivery systems. Based on best practices in several states, this bill is being drafted in consultation with NHELP (National Health Law Program).

The MHN Policy Committee has been working closely with UHPP on a bill sponsored by Rep. Jen Seelig designed to target the diverse populations that are currently under-enrolled in medical assistance and private health insurance programs. The bill allocates \$750,000 for 'mini-grants' to be distributed on a competitive basis to nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) that can demonstrate the ability to find and enroll eligible uninsured families. To compete for the grants the CBOs must have a track record serving diverse and non-English speaking households; they must also be fully equipped to educate the target population to make appropriate and effective use of primary health care services.

Efforts to integrate a health disparities focus into the broader health system reforms continue. Our success will depend upon whether the health system reforms are truly robust and broad in scope, for example: *are* they about expanding access, controlling costs, and improving quality? Are they designed to be affordable and culturally effective?

Now is the time to get involved in MHN!

MHN-sponsored legislation can pass, but only with your active involvement. Contact Isabel Rojas, MHN Coordinator, to learn how to get involved in MHN: Isabel Rojas: (801) 898-3923. Email: isabel@cuutah.org

8. ANNOUNCEMENT: UWISE Helps People With Disabilities Explore Self-Employment

The Utah Work Incentives Self-Employment project, or UWISE, has slots open in most Utah counties for one-on-one help for people with disabilities to start their own small businesses. You can call for an application or visit the web site, www.uwise.biz.

UWISE runs through 2008, services are free but has no start-up funds for participants. UWISE provides benefits planning, one-on-one step-by-step help writing a business plan, helps people connect with other business services, and individualized mentoring. For further information, please call Bill Walsh and Shirley Weathers, (435) 548-2630 or toll-free 1-866-618-7194.

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