

THE UTAH HEALTH POLICY PROJECT  
**HEALTH MATTERS**

*on the Hill...*



**Utah Health Matters E-Newsletter: 2008 Legislative Session Edition**  
**March 3, 2008**

Greetings Health Advocates:

The last three days of the 2008 legislative session are here and there are still important health bills and funding requests to be decided. In this issue...

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**1. A Tribute to Julien Puzey**

Julien Puzey, UHPP Board member and good friend, died peacefully in her home Friday night, surrounded by loved ones. A wake is planned for this Saturday night.

Julien was a true pioneer in end-of-life care for Utah. She helped raise awareness of the possibilities for dying with dignity and created many tools for families and communities that are still used today. UHPP would not be where it is today, were it not for her wise and generous mentoring.

Last December Julien wrote: "Know that you are loved—that you are love." "You can look for me in the yellow of the goldfinch or listen for me in the breeze moving a wind chime. You may even find me in your own laughter."

Her parting wish for all of us is to be our loving selves.



## **2. HB364, Health Coverage Promotion, still needs funding and Senate vote**

HB364 (Rep Kory Holdaway) will help the state of Utah fulfill one its key obligations in health reform: Getting all Utahns eligible for Medicaid, CHIP & the Utah Premium Partnership (UPP) enrolled. HB364 does two important things:

(1) The bill provides the health department a marketing budget for UPP. Currently 88% of Utahns have not heard of UPP. UPP provides a monthly premium subsidy of up to \$150 for adults and \$100 for children of working low income families to buy employer sponsored health insurance. This program is a cornerstone of the plan for health system reform laid out in HB133.

(2) It gets Utah schools to work with the Department of Workforce Services and the Department of Health to better promote UPP, CHIP and Medicaid to families when kids enroll in school programs like free or reduced school lunch.

HB364 has passed the House and is waiting to be heard in the Senate. Whether the Senate takes up the bill largely depends on whether money can be found to fund the UPP marketing budget.

If you can come up to the Hill, we could use help on this. For talking points click [here](#).

For a new summary of where we stand on most health funding priorities, visit our home page later today (are having network problems).

## **3. SB197 Preferred Drug List Amendments Could Save Medicaid Millions**

SB197 corrects a technical error in last year's legislation that implemented Utah's Medicaid Preferred Drug List program. Last year's legislation intended to exempt medication from the list when it is used to treat mental illness. To accomplish this, however, the legislation exempted all "psychotropics" from inclusion on the preferred drug list. Unfortunately, the definition of a psychotropic is much too broad and includes many drugs not used to treat mental disorders. SB197 tightens this definition to reflect the original intent of the legislation which will allow Utah to include many more classes of drugs on the PDL. Right now we are working on keeping this bill to its original purpose (PHRMA is actively working to undermine this as we write).

SB197 has passed the Senate and will be debated on the House Floor early this week.

## **4. HB131 Mini-Grants Initiative Has to Clear 1 More Hurdle**

Thanks to convergence of support from left (bill sponsor Rep. Seelig) and right (Rep. Dougall), the Mini-Grants initiative (HB131) is several steps closer to victory and full funding. Interest is growing in the less than ideal funding source, the Medicaid Restricted Account. Since the grants would be funded from a portion of the interest from the account, they are a suitable use for the account.

Please come up to the Hill to help with this critical step in health system reform and covering the low-income uninsured. For talking points click [here](#).

For a new summary of where we stand on most health funding priorities, visit our home page later today.

## **5. Medicaid Vision services restored and Dental for Aged Blind Disabled funded**

Last week, the Executive Appropriations Committee made two important decisions for Utah's Medicaid population. First, the committee passed intent language that will allow the Department of Health to provide eyewear to Medicaid beneficiaries for FY2009 so long as funds in the Department's base budget allow. This language paired with language allowing the Department to spend money already allocated last year, should mean that **eyeglasses will be available to Medicaid patients as soon as the end of this week!**

The committee also decided to spend \$2 million from the Medicaid Restricted Account to provide dental services to Medicaid's Aged, Blind and Disabled population for FY2009. This will allow Utah to maintain dental services to this population, however the solution is not ideal. The Medicaid Restricted Account is Medicaid's "rainy day" fund. In a time of surplus, it's bad policy to dig into this account to provide such a vital service. In addition, the legislature continues to ignore low-income parents in need of dental care. This population makes less than 54% of the Federal Poverty Line (\$5,200 for an individual) and cannot afford dental care on its own.

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## **6. Interim Study Topics Submitted...What Happens Next?**

Last Friday was the deadline for legislators to submit topics for study during the Interim Session ("interim days" are the third Wednesday of every month during the 'off-season,' April-November). UHPP worked with legislators to submit the following topics:

- Re-insurance as a Tool for Managing Risk and Costs of Catastrophic Care
- Pros and Cons and Removing the Medicaid Asset Test
- Access to Primary Care Providers & Adequacy of Primary Care Infrastructure
- Statewide Efforts to Address Health Disparities
- Several others.

Submitting a topic is only the first step. When the Legislature convenes in April (1<sup>st</sup> interim session after the General Session), committees will have an opportunity to consolidate and prioritize topics. It's never too soon to educate legislators about important topics.

## **7. [UHPP Health Bill Tracker](#)**

[UHPP's Health Bill Tracker](#) consolidates information on important health bills being considered this session. Clicker [here](#) to see the tracker.

## **8. [2008 Legislative Calendar for Health Advocates: What Happens in last 3 Days?](#)**

Keep track of events happening on the Capitol session. The Calendar for Health Advocates has dates, time, and information.

There are several important deadlines in the last 3 days of the Session.

Today, Monday, March 3: General Appropriations Bills, supplemental appropriations bills, and school finance bills are distributed to all legislators.

Wednesday, March 5: Last Day of Session. The final appropriations (\$) bill is distributed to all legislators and final action must be taken by midnight. Lots of amendments are often introduced in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. This is an opportunity for last-minute funding. For example, if for some reason a bill that was prioritized for funding does not pass all the way through, then a legislator can propose a different purpose for that funding. Towards the end of the Session, it is a good idea to write thank you notes to legislators (saves on postage 😊).

9. **[UHPP Health Action Center—All the Tool You Need to Stay Informed this Session](#)**

The [UHPP Health Advocate Toolkit](#) provides tools and information to keep you informed this session.

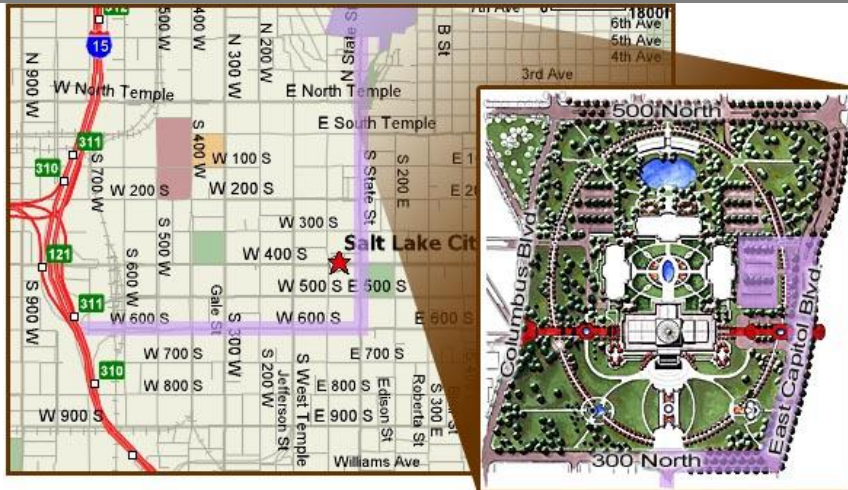
**[Call Your Legislator Cheat Sheet:](#)**

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.

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