



Health Matters E-Newsletter

February 12, 2009

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1. UHPP Health Bill Tracker

We are wrapping up the 3rd week of the legislative session! Check out the latest edition of our Health Bill Tracker. Legislation is starting to move quickly! The Tracker is posted on our website [here](#).

2. SCHIP Re-authorization and the Economic Recovery Legislation: Implications for Utah CHIP and Medicaid

Utah children no longer have to wait for health coverage...

Last week President Obama signed the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009 (CHIPRA). Besides providing funding so states can maintain their current CHIP programs, the bill provides for new investments that can help cover thousands of Utah low-income uninsured children previously ineligible for CHIP or Medicaid. For example, CHIPRA gives states the option to remove the 5-year waiting period for *lawful immigrant* children and pregnant women before they are eligible to enroll in federally financed public health coverage programs.

Already, some Utah legislators are interested in taking advantage of this new option. Representative Kory Holdaway (HB171 Children's Health Coverage Amendments) and Senator Luz Robles (SB 225 Child Health Amendments) are each sponsoring legislation that will remove the 5-year waiting period. And these initiatives couldn't have come sooner. According to Census data there are 11,000 uninsured immigrant children lawfully residing in the Utah. Five years is a lifetime for a child, and these children should not have to wait to get affordable health care coverage.

Congress is close to passing economic recovery legislation. Compromise between Senate and House and would bring much needed Medicaid fiscal relief to Utah.

Both houses of Congress have passed economic recovery legislation in the past week. Both bills include significant help to states to maintain their Medicaid programs. Utah should expect to receive between \$300 and \$330 billion in Federal economic stimulus money over the next two years. This should be enough money to

maintain eligibility standards for Utah's Medicaid program while at the same time restoring Medicaid cuts to services and providers that have occurred over the last several months.

It appears that Congress will vote on the House/Senate compromise bill by this weekend. The timing could not be better for Utah. New state revenue projections are due this Tuesday—all indications are the projection will be down significantly from January. Thus, even with this Federal relief, Utah will likely have little choice but to revisit the FY2009 base budget cuts the Legislature made just last month. However, thanks to Federal fiscal relief, Utah should now have the resources to keep Medicaid whole.

Utah Medicaid Partnership (UMP) Meeting on Next Steps for Medicaid and the Budget Crisis

The next UMP meeting will be Wednesday 2/18 at 1:15 in the Olmstead Room in the East Building of the Capitol Complex. Topics will include:

- The new state budget revenue projections and their implications for Medicaid; actions and positions to take as a coalition.
- How to maximize the federal economic recovery money to stabilize and strengthen Medicaid
- Strategizing around restoring the optional services cut in September.
- Possible alliance with Higher Education and Public Education and human needs groups around revenue enhancements and strategies.
- Please bring additional topics or email us in advance.

Now more than ever Medicaid and UMP need your input and involvement. Please plan on attending on Wednesday. To RSVP contact Lincoln at lincoln@healthpolicyproject.org

3. Health System Reform Bills to be Heard Tomorrow—Friday 1/13 at 8:00 AM

All three Health System Reform Task Force bills will be heard TOMORROW, Friday (1/13) at 8:00 am at the House (West) Building Room 30 in [House Health and Human Services Committee](#). Both the Insurance Market and Administrative Simplification bills have gone through a series of revisions over the past few months. UHPP was successful in amending parts of the Insurance Market bill and a substitute bill was made available to the public today. For an overview of what we have asked for, the outcome and next steps [click here](#).

UHPP plans to support the bills as a foundation for future comprehensive reforms, yet we will continue to push for additional amendments to strengthen the bills. In particular, UHPP is still concerned about the mandate-lite benefit packages and their consequences in terms of cost shifting, etc. One critical goal of health system reform is to realign incentives and define a basic benefit package that is aligned with evidenced-based medicine. Moving to mandate-lite packages before a review of the costs and benefits of each mandate can be completed to determine their value moves us away from this goal. We appreciate the intent to draw some of the currently uninsured into the market with lower cost packages, yet we need to ensure that quality coverage is not sacrificed and cost shifting is not increased. UHPP is working on getting a full analysis of all three bills out soon.

In the meantime, here are links to the full text of the 3 task force bills:

[HB188 Insurance Market](#),

[HB165 Administrative Simplification](#)

[HB331 Health Insurance Coverage in State Contracts](#)

4. Major Victory! SB 87 (Preferred Drug List Revisions) Passes the Senate!

SB 87 (Preferred Drug List Revisions, sponsored by Sen. Allen Christensen) passed the State Senate on Wednesday with 25 yes votes, 0 no votes, and 4 absent. This unanimous showing of support emphasizes that our state is prioritizing cost-containment within Medicaid over cuts to eligibility, services and provider reimbursement rates. *Thanks to so many of you who contacted your Senator* and urged him/her to support this legislation. With your help, we were able to solidify support around this legislation—overcoming the money and manpower of the

pharmaceutical lobby. Now, attention must turn toward passing the bill in the House. [Click here for UHPP's factsheet](#) on SB 87.

5. **Medical Interpreter Standards Act Passes in House Committee**

It's only the 3rd week of the Session, and already a sweet victory for the Utah Multicultural Health Network! Yesterday [House Bill 144](#), sponsored by Rep. Rebecca Chavez-Houck, passed the House Health and Human Services Standing Committee with unanimous support! This fine bill implements a new act creating a *voluntary* certification process for medical interpreting. It also outlines requirements for meeting the new quality standards. If you care about the quality of medical interpretation in Utah, please come up to the Hill and help us explain the importance of this bill to House members. For talking points and a helpful factsheet (to be posted tomorrow) please visit the website of MHN: <http://www.cuutah.org/MHN.html>. Click [here](#) for a handy Excel spreadsheet of all legislators.

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