



E-Newsletter August 2010

Topic 1: It's a Big Week at the Utah Legislature...

This week the Legislature will be taking up several important issues that will impact Utah's healthcare system, particularly Medicaid.

[Executive Appropriations Committee, Tuesday, August 17th, 1-4pm, Room 445](#) (click for agenda)

Executive Appropriations Committee will be looking at two significant issues.

1. The feasibility of privatizing the state hospital and developmental center.

Privatizing the state hospital and development center could have a serious impact on the care that Utahns with disabilities receive. The question of privatization of these programs has been of interest to legislators for many years. However, each time the Legislature has taken a closer look at detailed privatization proposals, claims about expected cost-savings and quality improvements have proved dubious. Rather than spending resources privatizing the hospital and developmental center, people with disabilities and taxpayers would be better served by improving access to home and community based services in the state. These services are proven to reduce the need for institutional care, thus saving the state money. And Utahns with disabilities also benefit by not having to choose between staying in their community and entering an institution.

2. Medicaid Management Information System Replacement Options

Utah's Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS), the computer system used to process payments to Medicaid providers, is antiquated, cumbersome, and lacking in critical fraud detection capabilities. However, this may not be the best year funding-wise to replace MMIS with a more sophisticated system. New MMIS systems are very expensive, costing the state tens of millions of dollars. Further, with health reform pushing states to move away from fee-for-service payment systems to new payment methodologies for Medicaid, it is not clear at this time what capabilities Utah will need in a new MMIS system.

Given the grim revenue outlook and uncertainty about future data collection needs, an expensive MMIS may not be a top priority for Utah at this time.

To learn more about the challenges of replacing our MMIS system in the near term, please see UHPP's new paper on Medicaid fraud prevention [here](#).

The Health System Reform Task Force, Wednesday, Aug. 18 9 AM to 12 noon, Room 250

This is the place to track the state's progress implementing federal and state health reform—and how these two processes interact. This meeting features:

- an update on the new federal high-risk pool (going well, though the waiting list is not very long, etc.)
- reports from the Task Force's 2 workgroups: Implementation/Oversight (the first August 5 meeting went well: but must be there to follow how leaders are handling the early federal reform opportunities and sometimes awkward interface between federal and state health reform) and Cost Containment (this group will have its first meeting on August 17th 4-6 PM in room 250. Note that neither workgroups will be generating any minutes—we're working on changing this.
- Update on the Utah Health Exchange from the new Exchange Director Matt Spencer.
- Update on the payment and delivery system reform demo projects.

Revenue and Taxation Interim Committee, Wednesday, Aug. 18th, 9am - Noon, Room 445

As discussed in earlier blogs, health reform calls for significant upfront investments in Medicaid. To help meet this need while limiting cost growth, the Utah Health Policy Project will be taking a closer look at state taxation and fiscal policies.

This month the Revenue and Taxation Interim Committee will be looking at, among other things, Tax Commission data matching. This issue is important for public health coverage programs because data matching can help simplify the eligibility process for programs like Medicaid and CHIP. For example, thanks to passage of [HB260](#) (Children's Health Insurance Plan Simplified Renewal by Rep. Newbold), the state of Utah is now exploring ways to verify income for the CHIP program via tax returns.

Health and Human Services Interim Committee, Wednesday, August 18, 2pm to 4:00pm, Room 225.

The Health and Human Services committee will be looking at one of the quality improvement components of federal health reform: incentives to reduce costly healthcare-associated infections.

The Committee will be briefed by the Department of Health about current hospital reporting requirements, the prevalence of infections acquired in the hospital, and how federal reform legislation may impact both reporting and prevention of these infections.

Workforce Services & Community Economic Development Interim Committee, Aug. 18th 9am Rm 450

Department of Workforce Services Executive Director, Kristen Cox, will be on hand to discuss a new rule change, [UT Admin Code R986-900 Food Stamps](#), that reduced the amount of assistance mixed

immigration status families can receive under the program. As a result, 2,200 families are seeing a reduction in food stamps assistance, and food pantry demand has increased. [Read news article here.](#)

Topic 2: Congress Provides States with Additional Relief for Medicaid and Public Education

To help states maintain their Medicaid programs and avoid laying off teachers, last week the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation extending the enhanced federal match states have received for Medicaid through July 2011 and provided additional funds. For Utah this means the federal government will resume paying 80% of the cost of Medicaid vs. the normal match of 72%. This increase will provide an additional \$57 million in federal Medicaid funds to the state. With Utah Medicaid rolls growing by 75,000 individuals since the beginning of the recession, this is much needed relief.

Please thank Congressman Jim Matheson for helping pass this critical support for states. Congressman Matheson can be reached by calling **1 (877) 677-9743** or visiting <https://forms.house.gov/matheson/contact.shtml>

To make the most of this federal investment however, the state should **use a portion of the funds to jump start family planning services for low-income families, a proven tool that will bring significant and ongoing savings.** By spending \$778,600 today to provide family planning services to families earning less than 133% of poverty (the income threshold for the state's Baby Your Baby Program) the state will save an estimated \$830,100 every year through a reduction in unwanted pregnancies and improved health outcomes.

[Read UHPP's factsheet about family planning here.](#)

Topic 3: Monthly Meeting—Community Meets with DWS to Discuss the 'List' Incident

Last month's unauthorized release of a list of hundreds of supposed undocumented immigrants by two DWS employees has raised a whole host of concerns about the confidentiality of information entrusted to the state by families seeking public assistance. Recognizing that the impact of the "List Incident" runs deep, involving issues like privacy, immigration, racism within state government, we discussed:

1. How could this happen? What impact has the department seen thus far?
2. How does the department protect confidential data? What type of training are employees given about privacy? What type of cultural competency training is provided?
3. How are the departments reaching out to mixed status and minority households to help rebuild trust? What things should the departments/state be doing?

Minutes from the meeting can be read [here](#). A news article covering the meeting can be read [here](#).

Dave Lewis, Communications Director for DWS, represented DWS at the meeting. He committed the department to do the following:

1. Explore developing and seeking community input on a written plan to address the alienation of immigrant and Latino families caused by the release of the list;
2. Continue to meet with the public to discuss how DWS can repair the harm caused.

Kristen Cox, Executive Director of DWS, will be hosting two meetings with the public regarding list on Wednesday, August 25th 9:00-10:00 AM. If you would like to attend, please RSVP to lincoln@healthpolicyproject.org.

Utah Health Policy Project has prepared a new report outlining the challenges of enrolling mixed status families in Medicaid and policy solutions to help enroll citizens in these programs. The report can be found [here](#).