

# UTAH HEALTH POLICY PROJECT

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### SEN. TED KENNEDY AND SENATE H.E.L.P. COMMITTEE RELEASE HEALTH REFORM BILL, “AFFORDABLE HEALTH CHOICES ACT”

**Salt Lake City, UT** –Just yesterday Sen. Ted Kennedy and leaders of the Senate H.E.L.P. (Health, Education, Labor and Pensions) Committee released their 615-page comprehensive health reform bill, the “Affordable Health Choices Act.”

“It’s a new day for all Americans, but especially for our uninsured, under-insured, our small business owners, and others who’ve paid the price for our inaction until this point,” says Judi Hilman, Executive Director of the Utah Health Policy Project. “The bill is as ambitious as it should be, given the magnitude of the problem. Utah’s political leaders should take note of the fact that Democratic leaders have released the proposal with the understanding that many hot-button issues will need to be resolved in bipartisan talks.”

The Senate Finance Committee will release its own bill sometime next week. After that the differences between the two bills will be worked out. The House will have its own bill, of course, though it is not expected to drive the process as much as the Senate’s proposals. The entire process will need to move at a frantic pace through the summer if Pres. Obama is to sign the final bill, as he insists, by October.

“No matter who is ‘in charge’ in Congress, the [Utah Health Policy Project \(UHPP\)](http://www.healthpolicyproject.org) is fiercely committed to bipartisanship in the solution seeking process. Why? Because at the end of the day, our health care system needs to make sense for all of us. AND, most critically, the reforms need to stick,” adds Hilman.

#### Highlights of *Affordable Health Choices Act* (UHPP’s comments in italics), from Kennedy’s press release

1. **CHOICE:** If you like the coverage you have now, you get to keep it. But if you don't have insurance or don't like the insurance you have, the bill provides new, more affordable options.

*UHPP’s Lincoln Nehring: “To address low-income Americans’ need for affordable coverage, the HELP bill expands Medicaid eligibility to higher income levels and to formerly optional populations like childless adults. Further, the bill makes it possible for moderate income families to participate in private market coverage by providing premium subsidies on a sliding scale up to 500% of poverty. A Medicaid expansion and far reaching premium subsidies will take the bite out of the individual mandate by making coverage affordable for everyone.”*

2. **COST REDUCTION:** The bill reduces health care costs through stronger prevention, better quality of care and use of information technology. It will also root out fraud and abuse and reduce unnecessary procedures.

*UHPP’s Judi: “The bill necessarily costs an arm and a leg at first, and this is because it will take many years to realize savings from these worthy cost containment and quality improvement measures.”*

3. **PREVENTION:** The best way to treat a disease is to prevent it from ever striking, which is exactly why (the bill) will give citizens the information they need to take charge of their own health. The bill will make information widely available in medical settings, schools and communities. It will also promote early screening for heart disease, cancer and depression and give citizens more information on healthy nutrition and the dangers of smoking.  
*UHPP’s Judi: “No one can argue with any of this—it’s actually nice to see this included right out of the gate. In previous attempts at reform, these elements were more of an afterthought.”*

4. **HEALTH SYSTEM MODERNIZATION:** The bill takes strong steps to see that America has a 21st-century workforce for a modern and responsive health care system. America must make sound investments in training the doctors, nurses, and other health professionals who will serve the needs of patients in the years to come. It will make sure that patients' care is better coordinated so they see the right doctors, nurses and other health practitioners to address their individual health needs.

*UHPP's Judi: We are very delighted to see this provision, as it will help address Utah's critical shortages in primary care providers. Also, in Utah we have growing support for medical homes (the notion that each one of us should have reliable access to coordinated care, a place to call "medical home". We like that this bill articulates a team approach to medical homes.*

5. **LONG TERM CARE AND SERVICES:** The bill will also make it possible for the elderly and disabled to live at home and function independently. It will help them afford to put ramps in their homes, pay someone to check in on them regularly, or any of an array of supports that will enable them to stay in their communities instead of in nursing homes.

*UHPP's Judi: All of this looks very positive, though the disability community would know more about whether these provisions are on the right path toward full community integration for the elderly and people with disabilities (start with Disability Law Center's Matt Knotts: (801) 363-1347).*

Note to reporters: Further analysis will be prepared in the coming days. If you would like to speak with an uninsured or under-insured person or small business owner about their perspective on the bill, please call our office: (801) 433-2299. Jessica's cell: (801) 712-4354.

Click here for a copy of the full bill, [http://help.senate.gov/BAI09A84\\_xml.pdf](http://help.senate.gov/BAI09A84_xml.pdf)

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