



## Meeting explains health reform

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ST. GEORGE - As several key provisions of federal health care reform took effect Thursday, a number of Washington County residents sought information about the law during a public forum in St. George.

Hosted by the Utah Health Policy Project, a statewide nonprofit organization, Thursday's forum was designed to expose members of the community to elements of the reform legislation signed into law 6 months ago.

St. George resident Kristy Baron, a nurse and associate professor at Dixie State College, said she was interested in learning more about health care reform Thursday night, as one of the provisions could have an immediate effect on her family.

As of Thursday, people younger than 26 have access to their parent's insurance coverage regardless of their marital status if they do not have access to insurance through an employer.

Baron said the provision could help her married 22-year-old son who suffers from high blood pressure.

With scarce income, Baron said her son has been forced to order his medication from India to cut costs, but she soon plans to add him to her insurance plan.

In addition to saving money on insurance costs, Baron said her son would have access to improved care through her coverage.

"Because he's on my insurance, he will have a better opportunity to follow up," she said. "I'm just happy that changes are happening."

During Thursday's meeting, Judi Hilman, executive director of the Utah Health Policy Project, explained the impact of many key provisions that went into effect Thursday.

The nationwide reform legislation now prohibits insurers from denying coverage to children with pre-existing conditions and canceling coverage when people become sick, Hilman said.

"If you are a child with a serious medical condition, you shouldn't be uninsurable," Hilman said prior to her presentation.

The reform also introduces tax credits for small businesses providing health coverage to their employees, Hilman said, with some companies entitled to rebates of up to 35 percent.

"There are some real important changes that are happening," she said. "In some cases, they will save people's lives. It is important that people understand those changes."

While some elements of the reform took effect Thursday, Hilman said many of the most significant provisions, including the expansion of Medicaid, would not begin until 2014.

Rep. Brad Last, R-Hurricane, who also spoke to residents at the event Thursday, said he is concerned about certain aspects of the federal reform law, including the costs associated with expanding Medicaid.

While the federal reform is going into effect, Last said he and his fellow state legislators would continue their efforts to improve Utah's health care system.

Cedar City resident Marsha Perkins said she traveled from cedar City to attend Thursday's event at the St. George Branch of the Washington County Library in an effort to learn more about the law in a nonpartisan environment.

"I'm just trying to get some real information," she

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