

Obama's Push for Health Reform Pleases Utah Health Care Advocates

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(KCPW News) While increasing federal funding for community health centers can't solve the health crisis entirely, Alan Pruhs of the Association for Utah Community Health says it should be a significant part of President-elect Barack Obama's plan for health system reform.

"If somehow we took a magic pill today and woke up tomorrow morning and everybody had health insurance, they still wouldn't have a place to go," Pruhs says. "They still would not have a primary care provider. So, we really believe that community health centers are a model that can be replicated throughout the country and that are complimentary to any federal or state reform efforts."

Pruhs says he feels confident that community health centers will be considered an important component of federal health reform with the nomination of former Senator Tom Daschle to Obama's cabinet. Obama's team is planning to give the health sector a \$50 billion infusion of federal dollars in an economic stimulus plan slated for Congress next month.

But details of the larger health reform plan could be left up to the states to decide. The Utah Health Policy Project's Jessica Kendrick says advocates believe Obama will pursue a "federalism or else" approach to health reform.

"That gives states like Utah the opportunity to embrace reform, with Utah values and Utah priorities," Kendrick says. "But also making sure that as a nation, we are addressing this problem and achieving the results that we want to see."

Kendrick says UHPP is excited to share Utah's progress toward health reform with the new administration. The group is sponsoring six public meetings across the state on Dec. 23 in collaboration with the Association for Utah Community Health. The meetings are an answer to the president-elect's invitation to advocacy groups to participate in drafting the federal health reform plan.