

Health reform bills given favorable recommendation

By Courtney Smith - 26 Feb 2009
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Utah health care may be in for some changes if five bills are passed by legislature, leaving Congress with a favorable recommendation.

The Senate Health and Human Services Committee heard five bills Wednesday regarding Utah health care, including three bills which make up the Health System Reform Taskforce, House Bills 165, 188 and 331.

HB 165 modifies the Health Code and the Insurance Code to provide standards for the exchange of medical information between health care providers, insurers and patients regarding payment for services, making the process faster.

HB 188 expands access to the health insurance market and increases insurance flexibility such as extending the time an employee is eligible for state-based COBRA. This in turn allows insurers to offer benefits which are exempt from specific state mandates and developing a system where employers can provide a set dollar amount for employees to purchase their own health insurance.

HB 331 will require contractors to offer employees qualified health insurance coverage during the duration of the contract, provided the contract meets certain requirements.

The Senate standing committee on Health and Human Services gave HB 165 and HB 188 a favorable recommendation. HB 331 is scheduled to be heard today. (2/27)

Two other bills were brought before Congress, SB 225 and HB 144.

As part of welfare reform in 1996, a five-year waiting period was established preventing legal immigrant children, and pregnant women, from accessing Medicaid or Children's Health Insurance Program, now know as the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

SB 225 gives states the option of lifting the five-year waiting period for legal immigrants to apply for public health insurance programs. This bill, commonly referred to as the Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act was included in the federal CHIP reauthorization earlier this month.

"In these tough financial times, some investments may actually reduce strain on the health care system," According to a fact sheet published by the Utah Health Policy Project. "Supporting ICHIA is not merely an investment in the well-being of a child, but it is also a means of reducing the strain on the entire health care system."

HB 144 seeks to improve communication between health care providers and patients by creating a voluntary certification process for medical interpreting.

"Pursuing voluntary certification of medical language interpreters is another way to reform our health care system by improving quality of care and containing costs in physician-patient settings," according to the UHPP.

"Translators would be especially important in the context of medicine," Morgan Asdel, from Ventura, Calif., a pre-media arts studies major. "It would be really bad if we couldn't provide [translators] and then mistakes were made involving someone's health."