



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact:

Lincoln Nehring or Judi Hilman
Utah Health Policy Project
(Work) 801-433-2299
(Cell) 801-870-3887

The Primary Care Network is not Health Coverage: 1st Order of Business for Health Reform Should Be to Replace PCN

Salt Lake City-Today at 5:00 PM there is a public hearing on a Department of Workforce Services rule change that will detrimentally affect Utah's poorest residents. The rule would require recipients of *General Assistance* (financial assistance for very low-income Utahns) to enroll in Utah's Primary Care Network (PCN) or risk losing their \$261 in financial assistance. As Crossroads Urban Center has pointed out, this is a problematic requirement in that PCN open enrollment for childless adults happens only occasionally.

UHPP Recommends: 1) Postpone Policy Change and 2) Replace PCN with Real Coverage

UHPP recommends that DWS postpone implementation of the policy until the future status of the PCN is decided in the health system reforms. "Hopefully, it will be replaced with comprehensive, affordable coverage...as the first order of business," says Elizabeth Garbe, UHPP Coverage Initiatives Director. The General Assistance (GA) population typically has chronic health care needs that are not met by the PCN. "If we truly want to reform the system, curb cost shifting, and ensure Utahns' needs are being addressed in ways that allow them to become permanently self sufficient, then we will replace the PCN," Garbe continues. "What is most alarming about this policy is that once again, we are setting up our most vulnerable residents, the poorest of the poor, to fail. If we expect them to get on the path to self sufficiency or to enter the workforce, yes, they absolutely must have health care. The problem is that this policy forces them to enroll in a program that, is not open for enrollment year around and will not meet their needs. It's a classic catch 22," says Judi Hilman, UHPP Executive Director.

According to UHPP, the proposed policy change reflects a lack of understanding of the challenges confronting the poorest of Utah's poor in their quest for self sufficiency. DWS is not directly to blame for this lack of understanding. This policy exemplifies a systemic, inter-departmental lack of understanding about the inadequacy of the PCN for low-income childless adults. Underlying DWS's proposal is a reasonable expectation that the state should help individuals who receive General Assistance gain the tools necessary to find employment and become self sufficient. There is a recognition that one of those tools is health care. However, the Department needs to recognize that the PCN is not that tool. The PCN only covers primary care and wellness visits. It typically does not pay for the treatment of the chronic health

conditions that are often diagnosed in the GA population. “The Utah Health Policy Project believes this one of the many reasons why we need to make sure that all Utahns are part of Health Reform. All Utahns need better access. Better health care coverage for everyone, including the mostly childless adults who comprise the GA population, benefits everyone, says Lincoln Nehring, Medicaid/CHIP Policy Director.

“The state needs to acknowledge what the PCN is, and what it is not. We need to have an honest conversation about what resources low income people need to find and keep employment. We need to stop tinkering with the PCN and start working on real solutions to Utah’s health care crisis,” adds Nehring.

UHPP can arrange interviews with PCN enrollees. To make arrangements, call 433-2299.

For further information

See UHPP’s Recommendations for Health System Reform:

http://www.healthpolicyproject.org/Publications_files/USHARE/HealthSystemReformRecommendations3-26-08Update.pdf

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