



Reform forum aimed to educate

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ST. GEORGE - With key provisions of federal health care reform taking effect today, the Utah Health Policy Project is hosting a public forum in an effort to educate the community.

Featuring a presentation from Rep. Brad Last, R-Hurricane, today's meeting was designed to expose members of the community to notable elements of the Affordable Care Act signed into law six months ago.

Beginning today, the nationwide reform legislation prohibits insurers from denying coverage to children with pre-existing conditions and canceling coverage when people become sick, in addition to other new regulations, said Judi Hilman, executive director of the Utah Health Policy Project, a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to health care reform research and education.

"You have a much stronger guarantee that your coverage is going to be there for you when you need it most," Hilman said.

The Affordable Care Act also now allows people younger than 26 to remain on their parents' insurance plans if they do not have access to insurance through their employers.

"We want them to be aware of the things they are able to take advantage of," said Wendy Knowles, education and outreach coordinator for the organization "We want to make sure that people are informed."

Knowles said today's forum is also set to explain the future of the nation's health care system, as many of the most significant provisions of the reform are set to take effect in 2014, including the expansion of Medicaid to families earning as much as 133 percent of the poverty level.

"It will be a very significant expansion for Utah," Hilman said of the impending Medicaid expansion, "Half of the people who are going to be newly insured as a result of federal health reform are going to be in Medicaid."

With federal reform expected to provide coverage for most uninsured Americans, Hilman said the law could have a tremendous influence on Washington County

In 2009, 11.9 percent of the county's residents were uninsured, surpassing the statewide average by a full percentage point, she said.

"The reforms are designed to make a decent benefits package available to most Americans by 2014," she said, with some families set to receive subsidies to assist in purchasing coverage from a new online insurance marketplace in four years. "We have finally started down this path and that will only be a good thing for Southern Utahns."

Hilman said Last is scheduled to answer questions from residents and explain Utah's approach to implementing health care reform.

"We want to have very practical nuts and bolts discussion about what is in the reforms and how it will affect people," she added.

The Utah Health Policy Project is hosting a presentation on health care reform today from 6 p.m. to 7:45 p.m. at the St. George Branch of the Washington County Library in Community Room B. The event is open to the public, but seating is limited and reside

For more information about the impact of health care reform in Utah, visit www.healthpolicyproject.org.

Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

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