



WVAHC Reform News

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care

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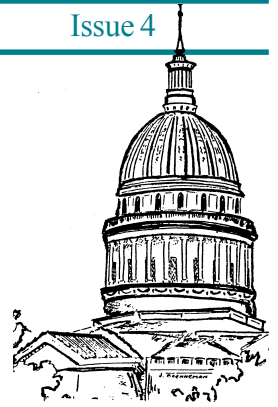
WVAHC to Focus on Cost Containment During the 2007 Legislative Session

The WVAHC Board has directed the staff to concentrate our efforts during this legislative session on cost containment initiatives. Part of the decision was driven by the timing of the Benedum grant (see story below). "The Benedum grant will allow us to develop much better supporting data than we have ever had before," stated Renate Pore, Board President. "But it will take us until the spring or summer to complete the actuarial study and then we need to conduct an extensive education program. This session we will concentrate on controlling cost, which is essential if we are going to preserve insurance for those who are

currently insured and if we are going to cover the uninsured in the future," stated Pore.

A series of cost containment measures will be bundled into one bill, tentatively called the Medical Cost Containment Act of 2007. Features would include:

- Establish a public-private partnership of the various payers in the state. Bringing together the



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WVAHC Awarded a Benedum Grant

The very good news in mid-December was that the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation has awarded WVAHC a \$75,000 grant. With this grant we will have a great opportunity to accomplish a number of activities. The grant funds in part:

- An actuarial study of our Blueprint for Reform, WVAHC's comprehensive reform package. The Blueprint for Reform has three basic components: meaningful cost containment; quality, affordable health insurance for all West Virginians; and significant insurance reform. (A copy of our proposal is posted on our web site at: www.wvahc.org.)

The actuarial study will give us concrete numbers on our proposal. Right now, we are relying on numbers that are out-of-date. Having verified, up-to-date numbers is essential if we are going to be successful in convincing the Govern-

nor and the legislature that they should adopt comprehensive health care reform.

- With the concrete numbers we will engage the business community in a dialogue on health care reform options. The business community are the purchasers of health care. To date we have been unsuccessful in getting past their objection to an employer mandate. Perhaps with reliable, updated numbers from the actuary and a systematic outreach program, we will be more successful.
- The grant will also allow us to engage the citizens of West Virginia in a dialogue on health care reform. There are two key constituent groups: the religious community and organized labor. Both have been extremely supportive of our efforts so far, and the grant will help us to

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An Organized Voice of Consumers in Health Care Reform.

WVAHC to Focus on Cost Containment

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public payers of health care (PEIA, Medicaid and CHIP) with the private payers of health care (Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield, Carelink, the Health Plan, etc.) can make a number of improvements that no one payer can, or should be expected to, make.

For example, the Blue Cross Blue Shield affiliates in a number of other states have funded electronic prescribing initiatives. It is unreasonable for Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield to carry the entire burden of funding an e prescribing initiative in West Virginia. All payers will benefit from e prescribing, and all West Virginia payers should share proportionately in the funding of e prescribing.

The public-private partnership may determine that helping to fund electronic medical records is also in their joint self interest. Or perhaps this partnership will lead to a unified disease management initiative that will work to improve the health status of West Virginians. This partnership could also consider a single nurse hotline for all West Virginians that could reduce emergency room visits.

- The Health Care Authority (HCA) should be given the authority to establish an annual benchmark for total health care expenditures for West Virginia and benchmarks for each sector of health care (e.g., inpatient, pharmaceuticals, outpatient, etc.) If expenditure exceeds the projected benchmarks, the HCA would make recommendations to you and the legislature on means that cost for that sector could be controlled.
- West Virginia should join with Oregon in their

independent review of new technology and procedures. All too often new procedures and new technology have been promoted by those who have a vested financial interest in the adoption of the procedure or technology. The state of Oregon, has begun a review of the cost-effectiveness of new procedures and technology free from economic interest. West Virginia should join in this effort.

- West Virginia should raise taxes on tobacco products and take action to support wellness initiatives. Increasing tobacco taxes has been proven to be the most effective means of preventing children from beginning to use tobacco, and West Virginia should rise on tobacco taxes to at least the national average. Other promotions of the well being of our citizens could include limitation of sodas and unhealthy foods in our schools or the removal of trans fats from state facilities.
- PEIA should be required to distribute advance directives, both living wills and medical power of attorney, to those who are covered by the state insurance program. Everyone should be encouraged to consider end of life care, and this would be one small step in that direction.

While the cost containment measures will be the focus of WVAHC's legislative program, there are other issues that will be part of our legislative program. These include:

- Adequate funding for the state Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to expand coverage to children in households between 220 percent and 300 percent of the federal poverty level by January 1, 2008.
- Requiring drug detailers to report their expenses spent promoting particular prescription drugs to physicians and other prescribers. Any prescriber who receives more than \$1,000 in "detailing" expenses should be identified. Detailing is the practice by drug manufacturer representatives influencing physicians to prescribe their drugs by providing doctors with everything from free pens to free lunches to free golf trips. The Kaiser Family

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Foundation has concluded that the pharmaceutical industry spends more on detailing (\$7.2 billion) that they do on TV and other advertising (\$4.2 billion in 2005). West Virginia should have data on individual physicians and how much they receive from the drug industry. You can review a fact sheet from the Kaiser Family Foundation on drug trends on our web site at: www.wvahc.org.

- Promote electronic prescribing: E prescribing is basically having a doctor email a prescription to your pharmacist. The prescription goes through special software that ensures that there won't be a reaction to another drug you are taking. It also allows the doctor to see immediately if the drug is on your insurance company's formulary. E prescribing greatly improves patient safety and helps to control cost. West Virginia is only one of three

WVAHC Awarded Benedum Grant

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reach out to both and provide an education program.

- Finally, the grant application suggests that a public opinion poll be conducted to gauge the views of West Virginia voters on health care reform options. In talking with people who were heavily involved in Vermont's highly successful reform efforts earlier this year, they indicate that a poll paid for by the Vermont AARP was one of the key pieces in their successful campaign. We will have to raise the approximately \$15,000 to complete the poll.

By now you are probably thinking, "Whew, thank goodness they got this grant. Now maybe they will quit asking me for money." We wish it were that easy. We will actually have to raise more money next year than we did this year to achieve our goals. But the Benedum grant allows a great opportunity to increase our impact by taking our research and outreach activities to a new level.

Thank you, Benedum.

states that doesn't allow e prescribing due to a Board of Pharmacy regulation. While everyone agrees that this regulation should be removed, the real test on whether e prescribing will quickly become a reality in West Virginia is whether the state and private insurance companies come together to help fund e prescribing.

- Requiring public input prior to Medicaid submitting a state Plan Amendment to the federal government. Last year Medicaid got approval from the federal government for major changes in benefits without any public involvement. We will work to ensure that this doesn't happen again. Also, there is growing legislative interest in having more oversight over Medicaid.
- Requiring that providers charge uninsured individuals the lowest fee that they have contracted with commercial insurance companies for a service.
- Prohibiting pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) from reporting prescribing patterns to drug manufacturers.
- Measures that will promote breastfeeding.
- Repealing the internal sunset provision of the state's mental health parity law. Mental health parity means that if an insurance policy covers physical health (for example, 20 physical therapist visits a year); they have to offer similar mental health benefits (20 mental health therapist visits a year).
- Support a state resolution in favor of a national single payer system.
- Support federal initiatives that will allow the states to be the incubators of health care reform measures.
- Support the creation of an independent insurance consumer advocate position.

This is an aggressive agenda. We will not be successful without your support. Please see Page 4 for ways that you can be involved with our reform efforts.

Ways You Can Be Involved

WVAHC works very hard to provide you accurate, timely information about what is occurring at the legislature. Here are a few examples of how you can be involved.

First, be a member of WVAHC. Our dues are only \$25 a year, although we certainly accept larger donations from those who can afford it. Donation can be mailed to WVAHC, 1544 Lee Street, Charleston, WV 25311, or you can donate online.

Second, register for our free eUpdates. WVAHC sends out updates weekly during the legislative session and periodically during other times of the year.

You can register for updates on our web site at: www.wvahc.org. Registration only takes a minute. However, it is a two step process. The reason for this two step process is to ensure that WVAHC isn't sending out spam.

Once you complete the registration form, you will get an email from confirmation@emailcounts.com on behalf of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care making sure that you want to receive future emails. In order to complete your registration, click on the button that says "Yes, I want to join," and your registration will be complete.

Depending on your email settings this reply email may be diverted to your spam or junk mail folder. If you don't receive a reply email, check these folders so that you can complete your registration.

Third, write a letter or email to your Senator(s)

and Delegate(s) and urge them to support health care reform. WVAHC has posted on our web site the names, home addresses, capitol addresses and work telephone numbers, and the email addresses of all Senators and Delegates. As with the general population, sending emails to legislators is uneven--some legislators use emails frequently, others not at all.

Here are some tips for letter writing/emailing. First, handwritten letters are acceptable. Share with your legislature your experience with the health care system. If you have specific measures or bills that you want them to support or oppose, let them know. Do not be demanding or threatening.

You can also leave messages for your legislators by calling 877-565-3447. Calling their office is more effective, since if you are unable to speak with them directly, you can leave a voice message on their individual phones. The 877 number above is toll free, but their individual numbers listed on WVAHC web site are toll calls.

Write a letter to the editor. WVAHC has posted on our web site the email addresses of newspapers throughout West Virginia. Take a minute and write a letter to the editor of your local paper.

If you are willing to **host a house party for WVAHC**, contact us. Perry Bryant, WVAHC Executive Director, or a WVAHC Board member will be happy to make a presentation on the Blueprint for Reform, our comprehensive reform package. You can email Perry at perrybryant@suddenlink.net or call him at 344-1673 to arrange the presentation.

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