

NEWS RELEASE

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MINNESOTA DOCTORS CALL ON GOVERNOR TO SIGN HEALTH CARE REFORM BILL

MINNEAPOLIS—The Minnesota Medical Association (MMA) representing about 10,000 physicians, urges Gov. Pawlenty to sign legislation that would set Minnesota on the road to comprehensive health care reform.

“The Minnesota Legislature is to be commended for passing historic health care reform legislation,” said James J. Dehen Jr, M.D., president of the MMA. The bill moves Minnesota toward the vision outlined in the MMA’s Physicians’ Plan for a Healthy Minnesota, proposed in 2005, – affordable health insurance for all, a focus on care coordination through medical homes, an investment in disease prevention with public health initiatives and more information about the cost and quality of care.

Public health. The bill sent to the Governor will provide statewide grants for programs aimed at reducing obesity and tobacco use. These efforts will encourage people to make changes in their behavior that will prevent disease and, in the long run, it will save money. “This is not an overnight solution, but a financial investment in a healthy future for Minnesota,” said Dehen.

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Health Care Home. The bill supports the health care home model -- coordinating care primarily for patients with complex, chronic conditions. It calls for a care coordination fee that is based on the complexity of the patient's needs and a reimbursement increase for primary care physicians serving in areas where the Office of Rural Health says they are badly needed.

- The bill will begin to shift the focus from responding to disease and medical emergencies toward preventing illness.
- The health care team is paid to keep people healthy by coordinating their care and linking patients to specialty care and support services.
- This is especially important for people with chronic illnesses -- serious complications can be prevented if their care is coordinated.

“This reform will focus on chronic illness where most health care dollars are spent and where there are the most opportunities to improve people's health and save money,” said Dehen.

Move to Universal Coverage. Increasing eligibility for state programs moves toward the goal of having all Minnesotans insured. The bill increases eligibility, modifies the affordability standard and makes it easier to renew enrollment.

In the long run, having everyone insured will reduce health care costs and make people healthier.

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- The more Minnesotans that are in the insurance system, the more affordable premiums will be because the risk (and costs) will be spread over a larger population.
- People with insurance will go to their doctor, not the emergency room when they get sick.
- If they develop a serious illness it will be diagnosed earlier when it's easier to treat.
- Immunizations and regular checkups will keep people healthier.

Cost & Quality Transparency. Improving the amount and accuracy of information about providers' cost and quality performance is important. The legislation calls for development of a uniform and valid methodology for calculating providers' combined performance on cost and quality. With patients continuing to face increased out-of-pocket costs, they deserve easier access to consistent and reliable information upon which to make decisions.

The MMA wrote to Minnesota legislators and to the Governor, urging them to support the compromise bill.