Coordinating health & health care for a thriving Kansas

KHPA™ KANSAS HEALTH POLICY AUTHORITY

2.29.08 Happy Leap Day!

KHPA Legislative Pulse

Legislative Activity

Legislative updates focused on KHPA stakeholders.

SB 660: New Comprehensive Smoking Restriction Introduced. On Wednesday in Senate Ways and Means Committee, Sen. Kelly (D-Topeka) introduced **SB 660**, a comprehensive smoking restriction bill (without a county opt-in) that would prohibit smoking in public places and places of employment and within 10 feet of entrances and exits at such locales.

The bill leaves in place the power of local governments to enact even stronger provisions than would be established by this new law.

SB 660 was assigned to Senate Ways and Means, a committee exempt from the looming turnaround deadline.

Continued

In the coming weeks, the legislature will debate funding for premium assistance, a program it established in 2007 with unanimous passage of SB 11. Premium assistance is the use of public and employer contributions to help Kansas families living in poverty afford insurance premiums, providing access to private insurance coverage. Kansas is at the forefront of a small contingent of states that recognize the importance of public/private participation in reaching sectors of the population that would otherwise remain without health insurance coverage.

Premium Assistance:

Smart Policy, Worthy of Funding

Unanimously supported last year and authorized by SB 11, the KHPA has developed the premium assistance program "Kansas Healthy Choices." This endeavor represents an investment of over 3,000 labor hours and a FY 2007 appropriation of $1 million dollars to achieve the legislative directive this fiscal year. The program will be ready for implementation in July 2009, pending funding from the 2008 legislature (first year funding is included in the Governor's budget).

KHPA supports the existing Kansas law created by SB 11 as good policy and considers it a significant step in helping very low income uninsured Kansans access health insurance. The current premium assistance law will insure 24,000 currently uninsured Kansans and strengthen the health care safety net. The goal of Kansas Healthy Choices is to ensure that newly covered individuals attain needed health care services in a timely fashion resulting in less costly treatments with better health outcomes.

KHPA applauds the legislature's decision in 2007 to create a phased-in private health insurance program to assist low income Kansans with family incomes up to 100% of the federal poverty level ($21,200 for a family of four). Per SB 11, the phase-in for this program is subject to appropriations and is designed to ensure private sector participation and competition by health plans. Changes to current law that reduce the number of beneficiaries will compromise the plan design, which relies on this competition in the health insurance market place.

Indeed, premium assistance is an effective, prudent use of public funds to save public dollars in the long-term, strengthen private insurance markets, and improve the quality of life and access to health care for thousands of Kansas families. Supporting Kansas Healthy Choices means providing a smart path to private insurance for those who would otherwise be unable to attain coverage by themselves.

NEW! Kansas Health Online offers tools to compare hospitals, find doctors and information about healthy lifestyles. Check back often for new updates!

From previous

Update on SB 493: **SB 493**, the smoking restriction bill that was amended with various exemptions in the Senate Judiciary Committee, has not been moved to a final committee vote. Nonetheless, Committee Chair Vratil has asked Senate leadership to "bless" the bill so that it will remain viable as the session rolls onward.

Health Reform Bills Face Turn-Around Deadline. The end of this week hails the turn-around deadline for bills to pass out of their house of origin if they are to advance further in the session (or for leadership to "bless" a bill by assignment to an exempt committee).

KHPA expects action on its agency reform bill **SB 541** and KHPA-backed health insurance reform bill **SB 540**.

SB 542 and **HB 2737** remain in their respective tax committees awaiting action.

KHPA Testifies on Insurance Coverage for Patient Care Services During Cancer Research

On Tuesday, February 26, the Senate Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee heard testimony on SB 629, a bill that would clarify that insurers are required to pay for routine patient care service in a clinical cancer research trial, if those same services would otherwise be covered.

Clinical trials offer patients access to new and potentially life saving drugs and cures.

- A ten percent drop in breast cancer mortality for women under the age of 50 is said to be the result of clinical trials research conducted in the 1970's.
- The dramatic progress made in treating childhood cancers in recent years is attributable, in part, to clinical trials because 60 percent of all children with cancer are enrolled in some kind of trial.
- For cancer patients, clinical trials are often the last resort after exhausting all other approved means of treatment.

Participation in clinical trials is low -- only two to three percent of eligible adult patients enroll in clinical trials with health insurance coverage of routine care being a barrier.

As is the case with most questions of insurance mandates, KHPA offered testimony as a neutral conferee. KHPA, however, highlighted that the State Employee Health Benefit Plan (SEHBP) and Medicaid already cover the cost of routine care for patients enrolled in a clinical trial, consistent with best practice standards.

The legislation was introduced on February 15th at the request of Sen. Barbara Allen (R-Overland Park). Proponents included the Kansas Medical Society, American Cancer Society and the Kansas Hospital Association. Opponents included the Kansas Association of Health Plans. No further action was taken by the committee.

Nominations Sought for E-Health Advisory Council

KHPA is seeking nominations for the newly created E-Health Advisory Council. The Council will act in an advisory capacity to the Governor and the KHPA to a) explore options and make recommendations to leverage the state's purchasing power which would promote the use of health information technology, b) provide guidance related to the operation and function of the Resource Center for stakeholders as outlined by the Governor's HIE Commission Recommendations, c) and provide recommendations on policy issues related to health information technology. More information on the council and nominations can be found at www.khpa.ks.gov.

KHPA Legislative Pulse is a publication by the KHPA Outreach Team distributed weekly during the legislative session. If you have questions or comments, contact Outreach Manager Mandy Cawby at 785.291.3627 or mandy.cawby@khpa.ks.gov.

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