



Senate Passes MO HealthNet to Improve Public Health care for Missourians

JEFFERSON CITY — After lengthy debate, the Missouri Senate recently approved important legislation reforming Missouri’s state health-care program. Senate Bill 577 replaces the inefficient Medicaid program with MO HealthNet, which focuses on preventive care over more costly emergency care and emphasizes transparency and consumer choice. This program will create a more efficient system by keeping people healthy, rather than merely treating them once they’re already sick.

Before lawmakers took steps to reform Medicaid, the program experienced exponential growth. In 1968, Missouri spent less than \$39 million on Medicaid, which represented just 4 percent of our total budget. By 2004, total expenditures approached \$5 billion, making up 28 percent of the budget.

This trend continued the following year. In fiscal year 2005, Medicaid expenditures grew by 28 percent. However, lawmakers had had enough. After passing legislation in 2005 to ensure health-care benefits are going only to those in need, the Medicaid budget grew by less than 2 percent the following year. Nevertheless, the Legislature is not resting on those successes. We are implementing a new health-care system that will provide better services while reducing the burden on Missouri taxpayers.

The wide-ranging makeover to Missouri’s public-health-care system outlined in SB 577 includes incentives for doctors and patients to decrease overall costs. For instance, physicians could receive more funding for reducing hospital stays. And health-care consumers who maintain health-improvement plans can earn credits for being on-time for appointments, getting screenings and reaching health goals set by them and their health-care advocate. Health-improvement points could then be used as credits on debit cards useful for co-pays, prescription drugs and other health-related expenses, such as gym memberships.

MO HealthNet participants also work with a “health-care advocate,” who serves as a patient’s home base for preventive care and when they need medical attention. A premium-offset program contained in the measure subsidizes private health insurance for employers and workers. In addition, lawmakers have included provisions in SB 577 implementing stronger penalties against providers convicted of fraud.

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MO HealthNet is a forward-thinking plan that will improve the health of Missourians and reduce the number of citizens requiring emergency care. Further, it empowers participants with transparency and real choices to create informed health-care consumers, reducing overall costs to taxpayers. I will continue my efforts to advance this measure through the Legislature.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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