



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Missouri HealthNet

JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri Senate this week gave first-round approval to legislation that dramatically changes the way health care services are delivered to those in need of assistance. Senate Bill 577 establishes Mo HealthNet, which replaces the state Medicaid program created decades ago. The current Medicaid program, which was innovative when it was implemented in the 1960's, has become a bloated, bureaucratic nightmare that fails to meet the needs of those it is designed to serve.

The wide-ranging makeover to Missouri's public health care system includes incentives to doctors and patients to reduce overall costs. For instance, physicians could receive more funding for reducing hospital stays, and health care consumers who maintain health-improvement plans would earn credits for medications and gym memberships. MO HealthNet participants also work with a "health care advocate," who assists patients in accessing care.

Participants of Mo HealthNet will have a choice of three health improvement plans. The plans will reward participants who make healthy lifestyle changes such as quitting smoking or losing weight by giving them credits they can use to reduce the cost of medications or healthcare services.

Participants will be offered a health care advocate who will provide comprehensive, coordinated physical and behavioral healthcare in partnership with the patient, their family and their caregivers to assure the best possible care. The health care advocate will provide a health care home for the participant, where the goal is to assist patients in accessing more choices in obtaining primary care, coordinating referrals and obtaining specialty care.

The health care advocates will be licensed health care professionals trained and certified by the Department of Social Services.

All health care plans establish a 24-hour, confidential, toll-free nurse health line to be staffed by licensed registered nurses. Participants will be encouraged to call the health line when symptoms occur, before making doctor appointments or visiting an urgent care room. Nurses will not make diagnoses or provide treatment but will help patients make good decisions about their care.

SB 577 also creates the Health Care Technology Fund, which will be used to promote technological advances to improve patient care, decrease red tape, and increase patient satisfaction.

The legislation also incorporates my bill to establish the Missouri Long-Term Care Partnership Program. Under the program, a person can buy a partnership-approved long-term care policy, which offers a way for that individual to qualify for coverage of the cost of their long-term care needs under the state Medicaid program without selling off most or all of their assets. Those trying to qualify for Medicaid would be allowed to keep assets equal to the dollar amount of their long-term care partnership insurance benefits beyond the value of the assets they would otherwise be able to keep under the state's Medicaid plan.

For example, an insurance policy with a value of \$100,000 (if fully paid out) would protect \$100,000 worth of assets if the policy holder then enrolled in Medicaid.

MO HealthNet focuses on preventive care over more costly emergency care and emphasizes transparency and consumer choice. The idea is to create a more efficient system by keeping people healthy, rather than treating them once they're already sick.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.state.mo.us.

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.