

Healthcare Update

Written by Mike Honda
Monday, 05 April 2010 12:00

On Tuesday, March 23, President Obama signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act into law. One week later, he signed the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act, bringing to a close the decades-long struggle for healthcare reform in the United States. I am pleased to have supported this bill, and look forward to seeing the many positive changes it will bring to our community, and to all Americans.

Recently, many people have contacted my office requesting information about this bill and asking questions about how it may affect them and their families. In order to better address those questions, I wanted to provide some information to make the recent reforms easier to understand, and to address some of my constituents' most common concerns.

If you have healthcare through a large employer:

Most large employers already use their large employee pool to negotiate lower premiums, to guarantee protections against age and gender rating and rescission, and to ensure that nobody can be denied coverage due to pre-existing conditions. Under the bill, if you are covered by a large employer, you are not likely to see many changes to your healthcare coverage.

If you are a small business owner or employee, or if you are self-insured:

Over the last few years, insurance purchasers in the small or individual markets have seen their premium costs skyrocket. In cases where many employees are seniors or have pre-existing

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conditions, the costs have often become prohibitive, and many small business owners have had to decrease or eliminate employee health benefits. Under the new health insurance reforms, small businesses will not be punished for having older or less healthy employees, and starting in 2014, they will be able to join with other small businesses and self-insured individuals to form larger purchasing pools with the power to negotiate lower rates. Small businesses will also receive tax credits to help offset the cost of purchasing employee health coverage.

If you are a senior:

Medicare already provides a universal health insurance program to all Americans over the age of 65, but before this bill, rising costs were putting Medicare's long-term solvency at risk. This bill will help improve the efficiency of the Medicare program, and will create new standards to improve Medicare's current coverage. These changes will help Medicare patients remain healthier, by eliminating co-payments for preventive care, and making it easier to see your doctor and catch problems before they become serious. Over the next few years, the bill also phases in a number of measures to close Medicare's prescription drug "donut hole", saving the typical senior \$250 in 2010, \$700 in 2011, and over \$3000 in 2020 in prescription drug costs.

If you are a parent:

You will be able to purchase coverage for your children, regardless of pre-existing conditions, and in many cases they may be guaranteed coverage by your employer. As young adults, your children will be able to remain on your insurance policy until age 26, giving them time to finish school and find a job without worrying about losing coverage.

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If you are a doctor:

The last few decades have seen a dramatic decline in the number of doctors specializing in primary care, leaving many primary care specialists with a large patient load and leaving many patients without a primary specialist who can spot problems early on. This bill will establish loan repayment programs for doctors specializing in primary care, and to those serving in areas where there is a medical shortage. The bill will also make it easier for physicians to focus on treatment, rather than payment, by ensuring that all Americans have health insurance, and by guaranteeing a basic level of coverage under all insurance plans.

If you are uninsured:

The number of uninsured Americans has increased every year for the last few decades, and as a result, many Americans have lost their homes, their savings, or even their lives when they contracted a serious illness. This bill will guarantee that all Americans can purchase coverage, regardless of age or health status, and will increase employer-sponsored coverage by establishing an employer mandate. For those who are unemployed, self-employed, or do not qualify for coverage by their employer, the bill establishes government subsidies which will assist them in purchasing the insurance plan of their choice.

If you have other questions about healthcare reform and how it may affect you, I invite you to visit my [website on healthcare reform](#) , or to review some of the [Senate healthcare reform resources](#)