

Ketchikan Forum
Alaskans' Health Insurance Coverage: Local and Regional Perspectives
 Ted Ferry Civic Center
 1:00-4:30
 Thursday July 12, 2007

NOTE: This forum summary was compiled by staff and captures the major points made during the forum. If participants wish to clarify or correct these notes, please call (907) 465-8509 or email Eric.Peter@alaska.gov.

Forum Agenda

- Welcome/Introductions
- Overview of State Planning Grant, Data Collected, and Other States' Initiatives
(presentation by project staff)
- Local/Regional Panel
- Roundtable Groups and Reporting Out

Participants

SPG Leadership Team: Guy Bell, Dept of Labor Administrative Services Director

Staff Presenters:

- Alice Rarig
- Pat Carr
- Neal Gilbertson
- Eric Peter

Opening Remarks: K.J. Harris, Ketchikan City Council

Panelists:

- Marko Depcevich, Mayor of Sitka
- Jack Davies, Davies Barry Insurance Company
- Karen Harris, Davies Barry Insurance Company
- Dr. Graham Chelius, Sitka Medical Center
- Leslie Haskins, Community Member

Summary of Attendees:

Community Members	Mayors or Civic Representatives	Legislators or Staff	Individuals Representing State Organization	Individuals Representing Community Organization	Media	Total Attendees
4	2		7	11		23

Major Points of Panelists:

Graham Chelius

1. Sitka Community Hospital loses approximately 1.2 million dollars a year to charity care.

2. Sitka Medical Clinic loses 20% of their income to charity care.
3. Sitka recently had a conference on healthy communities.
4. Costs related to providing health care for people in Sitka are very high.
5. Very strong believer in the single payer health programs.
6. It is a shame that in an industrialized country we don't offer accessible healthcare.

Karen Harris

1. Worked in the health care industry for the last seven years and has seen costs keep rising.
2. Smokers cause insurance rates to be higher.
3. Lack of awareness is a big part of what causes rates to be higher.
4. Alaska having a limited population makes it difficult to provide health care at a lower rate.

Jack Davies (of Davies Barry Insurance)

1. Has been in the insurance business 34 years. When he first was in the business, nobody purchased health insurance.
2. Health insurance is not something we have always had as a society.
3. We have health insurance [as a society] because healthcare has gotten so expensive in the past 30 years that one cannot afford to pay for it in the event of a serious illness.
4. Many people who cannot afford health insurance wait until they are very ill to go to the doctor.

Les Haskins

1. Health insurance is very expensive.
2. If you don't have money, and you don't have a chronic or fatal condition, you cannot get health insurance.

Marko Dapceovich:

1. Sitka has 400 to 500 seasonal employees in the fish plants.
2. The Sitka hospital spends over \$1 million for unpaid medical bills.
3. The City of Sitka is looking into ways to provide health insurance for all employees, and ways to help subsidize the hospital.
4. The Police Department's union was negotiating to have their own insurance, but it would cost the city more money because of the numbers removed from the policy pool, so the city negotiated to cover 100% of the police department's insurance as opposed to a raise in salary. Sitka noticed that the health of employees was directly related to the cost of insurance.
5. Sitka became a bicycle friendly community, to encourage residents to get exercise, and is looking at other ways to increase health awareness and activity.
6. There is a lack of awareness in a lot of people that can make a difference [example employers should negotiate with insurance companies for better rates; employers offering incentives to employees to stay healthy].

Summary of Report-Out of Roundtable Discussions

Table 1:

Concerns

1. Especially in Southeast Alaska there is a significant barrier to access to specialty care because of a lack of local availability, and travel expenses.
2. Lack of communication with family, with the physicians or other healthcare providers.

3. Ketchikan: shortage of appointment availability for the physicians in Southeast and specifically for urgent care visits or after hours care.
4. Uninsured don't go in for care when first appropriate, instead wait until it is too late or expensive.

Core Principles/Values

5. Overall quality and safety measures for everyone: there is a problem with medical errors and variable quality of care delivered.
6. Access.
7. Good communication and accessible universal healthcare records.
8. Children 18 years of age or younger should have access to healthcare before anyone else.

Solutions

9. Emergency facilities should recognize the difference between an emergency and an urgent care visit and should make urgent care appointments accessible and affordable by using the two tier payment and scheduling system as set up by the Sitka hospital.
10. Better preventive care accessibility and also recognizing that individuals are responsible for their health.
11. Tort reform to bring down health care costs. Medical court system may be of benefit.
12. Single payer system may be a solution to many of the problems.
13. Improving health behaviors.
14. Education about what healthcare benefits are: what is included in a policy and what isn't.
15. Mandating specific services to be covered by the state for everyone: example: immunizations, prenatal care.

Table 2

Concerns

1. Sitka has less of a problem with access than Ketchikan. In Ketchikan, one can wait up to two weeks to see a doctor, so people use the ER for primary care.
2. Retaining doctors and nurses is a problem in both areas.
3. Transportation issues: Medivac is expensive and happens a lot: for newborn babies and also 70 year olds having heart attacks.
4. Providing health care in smaller communities is expensive.
5. Medicare doesn't cover many services, and those on Medicare usually don't have the money to pay for health care.

Core Principles/Values

6. Equal access to care. Included in that should be dental.
7. Every Alaskan should be entitled to one free physical per year.
8. Prevention is important.
9. Medical insurance is confusing: rates, how much they pay for each procedure so on. Many patients only come in for free care. Many of the bush communities don't have any realistic healthcare options.

Solutions

10. We should do a cost analysis on a state sponsored single payer system.

Table 3

Concerns

1. Availability, costs, and appropriateness
2. The fact that health insurance is a business has too much emphasis in our society: it impacts the appropriateness, and sometimes the care people get
3. In Ketchikan, dental issues regarding Medicaid: lack of providers means lack of access, also a cause of people having to travel to see the dentist.
4. Lack of nursing care: it is difficult to get in to see a provider in an urgent fashion: accessibility.

Core Principles/Values

5. Care should be affordable and accessible for everyone.
6. Healthcare services should be available to the extent we value education for all people; healthcare should be a universal right.

Solutions

7. Increasing number of 330 sliding scale clinics (Community Health Centers).
8. Increasing recruitment for providers-will help reduce costs, especially for urgent care needs, or preventative services.
9. Increase in the general awareness of preventative care and health awareness-include incentives for healthy lifestyle habits.
10. Tort reform.
11. Cap or control on burden providers have to carry.
12. Expansion of Denali KidCare, Medicaid and other public health programs.