

Medicaid Matters

Approval needed on Senate measure to prevent disruption of services

The state of Alabama risks losing at least \$578 million next year, or as much as \$2.9 billion over the next five years unless bipartisan legislation now before the U.S. Senate is approved before the end of May, according to Alabama Medicaid Commissioner Carol H. Steckel.



“Health care services for thousands of Alabamians are at risk,” said Commissioner Carol Steckel, who called on health care providers, state agency representatives and consumer advocates to urge Alabama’s two senators to support federal legislation to impose a one-year moratorium on seven regulatory changes. In addition to jeopardizing Medicaid funds, the proposed regulations impose deep cuts to services funded by the departments of Public Health, Human Resources, Youth

Services, Rehabilitation Services and Mental Health and Mental Retardation, plus local school systems in Alabama. [Read more about the seven regulations >>](#)

On April 22, the U.S. House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly (349-62) to impose a one-year moratorium on seven regulatory changes. The legislation, HR 5613, “Protecting the Medicaid Safety Net Act of 2008,” delays implementation of the seven regulations through April 1, 2009. This legislation is expected to go before the U.S. Senate in May.

“We deeply appreciate the support of Alabama’s congressmen as we work to preserve these health services,” Commissioner Steckel said, noting that U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions has expressed strong support for the measure as well. “The Senate has several bills dealing with moratoria on the regulations, some which include all regulations and some that include just a few. As the deadline nears, we are urging our senators to support HR 5613 which is a moratorium of all of the regulations, even if it means adding it to a supplemental appropriation bill.”

Electronic health records key to health care transformation

Transforming Alabama’s health care system is contingent on the state’s ability to seamless exchange data between individual health care providers, state health and human service agencies and payers such as Medicaid so that patient health outcomes can be improved, according to Alabama Medicaid Commissioner Carol Steckel.

Commissioner Steckel joined Kerry Weems, acting administrator of the Centers for Medicare and

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Commissioner Carol Steckel discusses Alabama’s Together for Quality Project during a recent event on electronic health records. Kerry Weems, acting CMS administrator looks on.



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Electronic health records key to health care transformation

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Medicaid Services, April 2 in Birmingham to call attention to a new Medicare demonstration project that provides incentive payments for physicians' use of certified electronic health records to improve patient care. The Alabama Medicaid agency is coordinating the state's application to be one of 12 demonstration sites.

The project, which will be open to small- and medium-sized primary care physician practices, is expected to reduce medical errors and improve the quality of care for an estimated 3.6 million Americans. Over the project's five-year period, financial incentives will be provided to as many as 1,200 primary care practices that use certified electronic health records.

"The electronic health record is the cornerstone of a quality-driven health care system," said Commissioner Steckel. "This is why Alabama's Together for Quality initiative is not only developing an electronic health record for physicians and other health care providers, but an electronic clinical support tool that will support continuity of care and improved medical decision-making."

[Read more about Together for Quality >>](#)

Survey data essential to establishing benchmark for pharmacists

Alabama Medicaid officials hope that pharmacists throughout the state of Alabama will participate in a statewide survey that will enable the Agency to establish a benchmark that can be used to compensate pharmacists for the professional services they provide to Medicaid recipients.

"It is critically important that all pharmacists participate in this survey because the data collected will be used to determine a statistically valid, true cost of dispensing of medications under the Alabama Medicaid program," said Commissioner Carol H. Steckel. [Read more >>](#)

Medicaid's Scale Back 2008 weight loss winners announced

The Alabama Medicaid Agency has stepped off the scale lighter and healthier after losing a total of 726 pounds during Scale Back Alabama 2008, a statewide initiative designed to promote wellness and weight loss.

Nearly 40 percent of the 108 Agency employees participating lost at least 10 pounds each. Each participant was part of a four-person team during the eight-week effort. A total of 43 agency employees, who lost 10 pounds or more, were eligible for cash prizes in the statewide Scale Back drawing on April 1, 2008. [Read more >>](#)



Jane Bowman, left, and Jan Sticka, right, tied for first place in the agency's ScaleBack weight loss initiative that was coordinated by Medicaid Medical Director Robert Moon, M.D., and Executive Assistant Mattie Jackson.

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