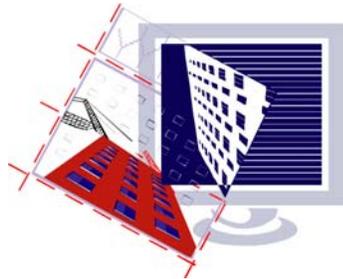


Medicaid Matters

State awarded \$10.5 million to build electronic health record system

Governor Bob Riley announced February 25 that Alabama has received \$10.5 million in federal funds to build an electronic health information system that can be used by public and private health care providers. [Link to information on Alabama's Health Information Exchange](#)

The award is part of \$385 million in federal stimulus funds awarded to states to advance the adoption and meaningful use of electronic health records and health information technology.



“Electronic health records make our health care system more efficient and improve the quality of care patients receive,” said Governor Riley. “Alabama has been leader in health information technology. Since 2007, the Alabama Medicaid Agency has led a broad-based effort to create a statewide electronic health information system that links Medicaid, state health agencies, health care providers and private payers. With this new funding, we will continue moving forward to build an electronic system that supports all health care providers, increases efficiency and maintains high quality for patients.”

Alabama's effort, known as *Together for Quality*, was a federally-funded pilot project to develop and test the use of electronic health records as a way to improve the quality of care provided to Medicaid patients, especially those with asthma and diabetes. The project's electronic health record has been in use since July 2008. [Read More >>](#)

Enhanced FMAP Extension needed to prevent drastic Medicaid cuts

Alabama Medicaid Commissioner Carol H. Steckel has joined with the nation's Medicaid program directors to urge Congress to pass a six-month extension of the enhanced federal matching rate provided under the federal stimulus program to sustain their cash-strapped programs through the nation's economic recession.

In a Feb. 5 letter to Congressional leaders, Steckel, who also serves as chairman of the National Association of State Medicaid Directors, emphasized that without continuation of the enhanced Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) rate, state Medicaid programs would be forced to implement drastic cuts in both coverage and services in Fiscal Year 2011. A recent survey conducted by NASMD found that state Medicaid programs face budget shortfalls totaling \$140 billion for FY 2011 without the enhanced funding.

The enhanced matching rate is scheduled to expire on December 31, 2010. However, unlike the federal government, many states begin their fiscal year in July, meaning states are already planning spending cuts for FY 2011. In Alabama, a six month extension of the enhanced matching rate would provide \$163 million for Alabama Medicaid's FY 2011 budget and prevent substantial program cuts. [Read more >>](#)



- ◆ **Dentists, Medicaid explore ideas to improve state dental program**
- ◆ **Telemedicine brings specialty care to medically underserved**

Dentists, Medicaid explore ideas to improve state dental program

The Alabama Medicaid Agency is prepared to work with the state's dentists to find new, innovative ways to improve the Medicaid dental program as long as solutions allow the Agency to live within its means, Commissioner Carol Steckel told more than 40 dental providers during an open forum held on February 26.

"Medicaid has a reputation of listening to our providers and advocates in order to better manage the program," she said. "However, we are still facing a severe budget shortfall and the economy is not improving, so we must look together at creative ways to continue to provide high quality services to as many of our children as possible while recognizing budget realities."

Prior to the open discussion with state dental providers, Commissioner Steckel announced that she would appoint a sub-committee of dentists to look at ways that Medicaid and the dental community can accomplish the goals of high quality care, access to services and efficient management of the program. [Read more >>](#)



Listening to discussion, left to right, Henry Davis, Governmental Affairs director, Alabama Medicaid, Dr. Zack Studstill, interim executive director, Alabama Dental Association, Robin Ashworth, Dr. Alan Yount, and Dr. David Johnson.

Telemedicine brings specialty care to medically underserved

Medicaid patients in the state's more remote locations will have a new option for receiving specialty care close to home, thanks to a new telemedicine service approved by the federal government.



Approval by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in February now makes it possible for Alabama Medicaid-enrolled dermatologists and psychiatrists to bill the Agency for certain telemedicine services. Covered procedures include consultations, office or outpatient visits, certain neurological exams and individual psychotherapy visits, among others.

To receive telemedicine services, the patient must be referred by his or her primary care doctor or clinic to a dermatologist or psychiatrist who has enrolled as a telemedicine provider, and receive the service in an approved location, such as a doctor's office or clinic, hospital, community mental health center or public health department. Services provided via telecommunications technologies are not covered if the recipient has access to a comparable service within 50 miles of his/her place of residence.

Telemedicine services must include the option of an interactive audio and video system which permits confidential two-way communication. Medical services provided by telephone, email or fax do not qualify as a telemedicine service. [Read more >>](#)

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