

Medicaid Matters

Commissioner Mullins: Making the case for Meaningful Change

When he became Medicaid commissioner in January 2011, R. Bob Mullins, Jr., MD, immediately put his medical expertise to work by doing a thorough history and physical on his new “patient.” What he learned from his initial examination of the Alabama Medicaid Agency was no surprise: While budget issues have historically dominated legislative and public discussions, there are a number of urgent and compelling issues that must be addressed to maintain the financial health of the state and the overall health of a growing number of Medicaid recipients.

“The one most valuable asset I brought with me to this job is the ability to do a history and physical,” he said. “Dr. Tinsley Harrison (first chair of medicine and second dean at Medical College of Alabama, now part of the University of Alabama Birmingham) was right; if you listen, the patient will tell you what’s wrong. I have found that if you will listen with an open mind, understand where you want to go and ask the right questions, you can figure out pretty quickly what needs to be done at Alabama Medicaid.”



Dr. Mullins participates in discussion about health care reform readiness.

Seven months into his tenure as Medicaid Commissioner, the longtime family physician is prepared to not only take on the budgetary and administrative challenges of managing an organization with a \$6.3 billion budget, but also to make the case for change – *meaningful change* – during the next fiscal year.



Dr. Mullins listens to Rep. Greg Wren, R-Montgomery.

“During my first month at Medicaid, I discovered that we were not where we should be with our information technology,” Dr. Mullins explained. “Our enrollment system was 30 years old and we were hampered in our ability to share information both inside and with other agencies outside Medicaid. Due to the funding streams from CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services), Medicaid had become the default agency for the development of the IT infrastructure for both the Insurance Exchange and the Health Information Exchange since 2009. I made

the decision early on that the development of our IT system had to be our primary initial goal in order for the agency to meet the demands of the fundamental changes going on in Medicaid and health care.” [Read more >>](#)



Inside:

- Care Networks provide new venues for improved health care
- TFQ Initiative creates impetus for Alabama’s technology growth

Alabama Medicaid Agency P.O. Box 5624 Montgomery, AL 36103-5624

Care Networks provide new venues for improved patient care

Early reports from physicians participating in Medicaid's new care networks suggest that the network concept will not only work well in Alabama, but will provide new venues for physicians, pharmacists, care managers and others to collaborate in ways that will result in better care at a lower cost.



"The physicians in the west Alabama network are already organizing workgroups to look at the asthma and diabetes standards of care, tools for practices and other possibilities," said Medicaid Chief Medical Officer and Deputy Commissioner of Health Systems Robert Moon, M.D. He noted that within the first month in one network, collaboration between the network's pharmacist and a care manager identified a diabetic patient who was receiving a medication from someone other than their primary care physician that would exacerbate the patient's diabetes. After being contacted by the network pharmacist, the primary care doctor was able to successfully intervene and correct the issue avoiding a possible ER visit or admission for out of control diabetes.

"There is a lot of enthusiasm and interest around the concept of locally-led care networks and we look forward to the ideas that providers in the networks will generate to improve patient care and control costs," he said.

The first network, a four-county area in east Alabama, began August 1 to offer services in Lee, Chambers, Tallapoosa and Macon counties. The other two networks began September 1 in west Alabama (Tuscaloosa, Fayette, Pickens, Greene, Hale and Bibb counties) and Area 3 in north Alabama (Madison and Limestone counties). Approximately 80,000 Medicaid recipients are part of the pilot project. [Read more >>](#)

TFQ Initiative creates impetus for Alabama's technology growth

Three years after the Alabama Medicaid Agency won a federal grant to begin transforming its processes from paper to electronic, the Agency has completed a pilot project whose lessons are now helping to chart the course for a statewide health information exchange while reducing the Agency's dependence on paper records.

The three-pronged initiative, called *Together for Quality*, was designed to improve health outcomes through chronic disease case management, improved coordination of health services, and reduced duplication and costs. A \$7.6 million federal grant awarded in January 2007 provided funding for the effort and jumpstarted the state's progress to develop health information technology.



The initiative included the *QTool*, an electronic health record, *Q⁴U*, a care management program for chronic diseases patients, and *Qx*, a system designed to allow agencies to exchange data on shared clients.

The web-based *QTool* allowed providers access to patient information, bringing together medical claims data from patient office visits, hospitalizations and emergency department visits as well as immunization records, laboratory test results and pharmacy information. [Read more >>](#)

Contact Us: Recipient Questions & Assistance: 1-800-362-1504
Provider Assistance (HP) 1-800-688-7989
Website: www.medicaid.alabama.gov

