

Health Reform Update- August 2010

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Launches Consumer Website

HHS launched a new website, [Health Care - HealthCare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov). The website, managed by HHS pulls together multiple tools (blogs/videos/chats), specific federal health reform information fact sheets, and many consumer resources about health insurance.

Listed below is a short description of the website's five main menu tabs:

1. Understanding the New Law – includes a timeline for introduction of the new provisions, a video providing an overview of key parts of the law, highlights for seniors on Medicare, and more. In this section you will find an excellent health reform provision timeline which lets you click through each year, month by month, and see when specific elements of the reform take effect.

<http://www.healthcare.gov/law/timeline/index.html>

2. Compare Health Care Quality – this is the same information that has been available on the Medicare “QualityCompare” website, but is now being promoted to people of all ages and coverage types. Hospitals, nursing homes and dialysis units are profiled.

3. Learn about Prevention - leads readers to the HealthFinder.gov web page, where a variety of helpful topics can be researched: healthy eating, well child/immunization guidelines, fitness tips, and more. Included is the A-Z topic-finder providing access to “trusted sources” of health information.

4. Information for You - provides helpful information topics tailored for families, seniors, parents, young adults, the disabled and employers.

5. Find Insurance Options - uses a screening tool to help the uninsured find out what policies in their state may be suitable for their needs. Users are directed to several websites, (Vermont BISHCA/BCBS/MVP/Catamount/Medicare) to view available insurance information related to their specific needs. There is also a listing of clinics offering free or discounted health care services.

HHS Approves 2000 Employer health Insurance Plans for Participation in the Early Retiree Reinsurance Program

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently announced that 2,000 employer health plans have been approved for participation in the *Early Retiree Reinsurance Program*. Once an applicant plan is approved, and as long as the \$5 billion appropriation holds out, HHS will reimburse health plans for 80% of “early retiree” health claims between \$15,000 and \$90,000. The program is intended to encourage employers to maintain health plans that cover retirees who leave employment prior to Medicare eligibility.

According to HHS, the following Vermont employer plans have been approved:

Central Vermont Public Service Corporation
National Life Insurance Company
State of Vermont Teachers' Retirement System
The Institute of Professional Practice, Inc.
The President and Fellows of Middlebury College
Vermont State Colleges
University of Vermont and State Agricultural College

The HHS department continues to approve applications daily.

Update State of Virginia's Lawsuit against National Health Reform Law

On August 2nd a federal judge has allowed the State of Virginia to take another step in its lawsuit against implementation of the national health reform law. The state's General Assembly passed a law earlier this year that exempts state residents from the federal coverage mandate, and the lawsuit asserts that Congress doesn't have the Constitutional authority to impose the individual coverage mandate thwarting the state law. The U.S. Justice Department moved for dismissal of the suit, but the judge ruled that he would hold hearings in October where both sides can present their arguments on the case. Twenty other states have joined in a similar suit filed in a Florida federal court. The Justice Department has argued in the Florida and Virginia cases that because the mandate is not imposed on state government, states have no standing to bring the lawsuit, and the mandate and penalty are within the Constitutional power of the Congress to tax and to spend tax dollars.

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