

HealthMatters UPDATE

November 25, 2009: Wellness Incentives in the Senate Bill

Wellness Incentive Restored

Our efforts to advocate for the Senate Finance Committee version of the Wellness Incentives were successful. Thank you for calling your Senators to ask them to support these provisions. The provisions were included in the Senate health care reform bill titled "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act." that was introduced for debate in the Senate on Saturday, November 21.

The key provisions are 1) codify the HIPAA regulations to statute, 2) increase the maximum value of incentives to 30% of the health plan cost, 3) allow Health and Human Services (HHS) to increase the discount to 50% if research demonstrates this is warranted and 4) direct the HHS to establish a pilot study to test similar incentives in 10 states by 2014, and expand this to all remaining states by 2017. These provisions are in 'SEC. 2705 which is titled PROHIBITING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES BASED ON HEALTH STATUS, which can be found through this link. Sec 2705 starts on page 83. The text relevant to the wellness incentives starts on line 21 of page 85.

Other Wellness Provisions Removed

Unfortunately, key provisions that had been in the Senate HELP Committee and Finance Committee bills were not included in the combined bill. These include the following: 1) a national campaign to employers on the benefits of workplace health promotion programs, 2) research on best practices in workplace health promotion programs, and components, and 3) grants to pay a portion of the cost of comprehensive workplace health promotion programs.

The grant program (provision #3) was included in the House of Representatives HR 3962, the Affordable Health Care for America Act passed on November 7. We will continue to advocate for all three provisions to be restored in the final Senate bill.

Projected Timetable

Congress is on recess this week. They hope to begin debate on the bill when they return on November 30, and vote to pass it before they leave for recess just before Christmas. They hope to resolve differences between the House and Senate version by mid January and send it to the president for signature before his State of the Union Address in January.

Upcoming Advocacy Efforts

We will contact you in early December to let you know how we need your help during the balance of the year.

Respectfully,

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