

5 Things you Need to Know About Health Care Reform

A Resource for Health & Wellness Decision Makers



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Five Health and Wellness Implications of the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (H.R. 4872)

SHORT TERM PROVISIONS:

1. **National Health Promotion Council** – this new organization will coordinate federal prevention, wellness, and public health activities. Within a year of enactment, a national strategy to improve the nation's health will be developed as well.

Implication: More wellness resources will be available for employers to promote health and wellness. This will gradually shift the dialogue to include an emphasis on personal responsibility and accountability for one's health and lifestyle choices. Resulting education initiatives will encourage physical activity.

2. **Preventive Services** - Within six months of enactment, qualified health plans will be required to provide, at a minimum, coverage without cost-sharing for preventive services rated A or B by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, recommended immunizations, preventive care for infants, children, and adolescents, and additional preventive care and screenings for women.

Implication: Removing barriers to preventive care is an important step in improving the overall health of employees and their families. Pro-active utilization of preventive services allows for early identification of potential health problems.

3. **Access to Care** - H.R. 4872 increases funding by \$11 billion for community health centers and the National Health Service Corps over five years (effective fiscal year 2011); establishing new programs to support school-based health centers and nurse-managed health clinics (both effective fiscal year 2010).

Implication: As financial barriers to preventive care are removed and providers try to meet increasing demands for service, access could become an issue. This funding will help to bridge the gap, providing new and expanded options for basic care. Effective wellness programs will educate employees on appropriate levels of care and whether self care, a routine medical visit or emergent care is most appropriate.

LONG TERM PROVISIONS:

4. **Employer Wellness Program Grants** – With appropriations beginning in fiscal year 2011 and extending for five years, grants will be provided to small employers that establish wellness programs. Technical assistance and resources will be provided to evaluate employer-based wellness programs. Within two years of enactment, a national worksite health policies and programs survey will be conducted to assess employer-based health policies and programs.

Implication: According to the Small Business Administration, small employers represent 99.7 percent of all firms, and they employ just over half of all private sector employees. This grant program opens the doors, providing wellness program access to a majority of American workers. As with any significant reform, the public will be watching closely, and with these funds will come increased accountability. Programs will be expected to show a return on investment in terms of measureable improvements in employee health.

5. **Employee Participation Incentives** - Employers will be permitted to offer rewards to employees—in the form of premium discounts, waivers of cost-sharing requirements, or benefits that would otherwise not be provided—of up to 30% of the cost of coverage for participating in a wellness program and meeting certain health-related standards. Employers must provide an alternative standard for individuals for whom it is unreasonably difficult or medically inadvisable to meet the standard.

Implication: Tangible rewards, such as premium discounts, provide a powerful motivator for behavior change when coupled with education, tools and a supportive environment. By incentivizing program participation, employers can join the effort to help employees change unhealthy behaviors. Health care professionals can assist employers in defining alternative standards for employees who cannot meet the program benchmark.

St. John's Corporate Health & Wellness offers consulting services that can help your wellness program evolve and thrive in this new era. Contact us at CHWinfo@mercy.net or (417) 820-3400 to find out how our highly trained wellness consultants can help your organization.