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Greetings!

The Chester County Women's Commission is committed to empowering women throughout Chester County. Our Commission accomplishes this in part by providing knowledge and bringing focus to pertinent issues and current events that impact women.

We are pleased to launch this quarterly newsletter series with help from our legislative and research committees with a focus on the area of health care. Over the past few months and moving forward we see the topic of health care reform as a significant issue that impacts women and children in Chester County.

Below, please find an article that we hope will provide you with an overview of Governor Rendell's recent health care reform laws.

To healthy, wealthy, and wise women,

Lisa Spangler, Chair
[Chester County Women's Commission](#)

P.S. [Please visit our blog!](#) Your comments are appreciated.

On June 10th, Governor Rendell signed three health care bills that were part of his Prescription for Pennsylvania health care reform plan and a fourth that was originally proposed as part of the Senate Republican package of health care bills.

According to the Governor's office:

"One of these bills will be the answer to the prayers of parents whose kids will be graduating from college and will be kicked off their health insurance policies because they've reached the maximum age. Parents and kids are stressed because the kids are now uninsured and are having trouble finding jobs, with health insurance, due to the current economic situation.



Another bill will help relieve the worry of the employee of a small business who is about to lose his or her job and will now be given the opportunity to keep and pay for health insurance for a short period of time while searching for another job or being rehired by the employer as the economy recovers.

We will end the practice of paying for medical errors by making it illegal for health care providers to charge when they've made a serious, preventable medical mistake. Can you imagine any other business that charges you to fix a mistake that it has made? And we will continue to benefit from the groundbreaking work started 23 years ago by the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council, the nation's premier health care data collection and reporting agency."

The four health care bills the Governor signed are:

HB 84 - part of the Governor's Rx for PA, this bill prohibits health care providers from seeking reimbursement for a serious, preventable medical error, often called "never events."

Approximately 140 patients who experience an adverse medical event that might be both serious and preventable die each year in Pennsylvania hospitals. The total charges for the hospital stays in which these deaths occurs amounts to approximately \$21.8 million dollars. Approximately 3,500 other patients a year survive an adverse event for which charges are an addition \$316 million a year.

In January 2008, the Department of Public Welfare implemented a policy to prohibit hospitals to bill Medicaid for 27 "never events," such as operating on the wrong patient, medication errors that result in death or disability and bad blood transfusions.

The House bill was sponsored by Rep. Tony M. DeLuca (D) and a similar bill was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Donald C. White (R).

SB 189 - this bill was also part of Rx for PA and will allow uninsured, single, adult children up to age 30 to be covered by their parents' health insurance plan. Parents must pay the premiums and the coverage hinges on the employers' willingness to

offer the benefit to parents. This bill will go into effect in six months and coverage will be available on a rolling basis after that as contracts are renewed.

According to the 2008 survey by the Insurance Department, there are 383,298 uninsured Pennsylvanians between ages 19-29, which accounts for 40 percent of the total uninsured population. While not all of these Pennsylvanians would be able to be covered by a parent's policy, this will be an important step to increasing access to health care for this population.

The Senate bill was sponsored by Sen. Jake Corman (R) and the HB 838 which mirrored it was sponsored by Rep. Mark Longietti (D).

HB 1089 - Federal COBRA law, which allows those who lose their jobs to continue paying for health insurance through their former employers for a period of time, applies to all employers with 20 or more employees. The concept of providing continuation coverage to small businesses with fewer than 20 employees was initially proposed by Sen. Corman as SB 189. This bill, which was sponsored in the House by Rep. Robert F. Matzie, allows employees of small businesses who lose their jobs to continue receiving their health insurance at their expense for up to nine months.

This is particularly important because the federal stimulus plan permits employees who lose their jobs and who qualify for COBRA to receive a federal government subsidy of 65 percent of the premiums for the coverage, so long as the employee pays the remaining 35 percent. So, in Pennsylvania, any employee of a small business who is terminated after July 10, 2009, and before Jan. 1, 2010, will be eligible for the subsidy. Because of the high cost of individual and continuation health care coverage, this financial assistance is critical to helping these individuals to afford to continue their former employer-based coverage under Mini COBRA.

SB 89 - this bill, also supported in the Governor's Rx for PA, reauthorizes the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council, or PHC4, which is broadly acknowledged as the nation's premier agency of its kind. The work of PHC4 is critical to improving patient safety and health care quality outcomes, as well as health care cost containment, for Pennsylvanians. Health care purchasers, such as businesses and labor unions, use PHC4 data for plan design and cost and quality improvements. The agency had sunset last year without legislative reauthorization and was kept in operation through an executive order by Governor Rendell.

A study in the August 2008 American Journal of Medical Quality estimated that PHC4's public reporting process prevented 1,500 deaths in one year in just six disease and treatment categories. PHC4's own findings show improvements in hospital care over the past 12 years of public reporting have saved an estimated 49,000 lives and \$1.7 billion in hospital charges. Since PHC4's public reporting of heart surgeries began, the mortality rate for heart bypass surgery in Pennsylvania has dropped 51.7 percent.

PHC4's first-in-the-U.S. public report quantified the cost and associated deaths from

hospital-acquired infections, and resulted in Act 52 of 2007 which addressed infection prevention and reduction. After the first year of implementation of Act 52, the infection rate in PA hospitals dropped 7.8 percent resulting in an estimated savings of \$372 million.

SB 89 was sponsored by Sen. Patricia H. Vance (R) and a similar bill, HB 173, was sponsored in the House by Majority Leader Rep. Todd A. Eachus (D).

More information on the new Mini COBRA bill can be found at <http://www.ins.state.pa.us/ins/cwp/view.asp?a=1274&Q=550035&PM=1> and information on insurance for adult dependent children is at http://www.ins.state.pa.us/ins/lib/ins/consumer/brochures/SB_189_061009.pdf.

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