

Health Care

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HB 3923 The Health Carrier External Review Act was signed into law, a step to ensure that premiums for individuals and small employers relate to the value of services received, prohibiting disproportionate administrative and marketing overhead. Provisions in the current health care bills in Congress could strengthen the authority of state Insurance Directors.

State of Illinois backlog of health care bills remains a serious threat to the Medicaid program. While federal stimulus money will provide additional reimbursement through 2011, it will not erase the debt.

Nursing Home Safety/Mental Health

Illinois' odd solution to use nursing homes as residences for the seriously mentally ill has received public attention. A *Chicago Tribune* series in 2009 illustrated how the needs of vulnerable persons – those with serious mental illness, disabilities, and frail, elderly are put at risk by this practice.

National Health Care Reform

Before the 2008 election, LWVUS President Mary Wilson wrote in a "Letter to the Next President:" "America's health care status is endangering our economy and our health." Last July LWVUS came out in support of HR 3962, the bill that mostly closely embodied League's long held comprehensive Health Care position.

League Presidents and members received calls to action to contact their representatives on behalf of 3962. During the August recess many legislators faced organized opposition to health care reform when they returned to their home districts. The Campaign for Better Health Care, www.cbhconline.org, a LWVIL Coalition, organized Congressional District meetings. Local leagues worked with CBHC and other advocates on community forums.

By year end both the House and Senate passed Health Reform bills. LWVUS most recently (1/21/10) urged the House to pass the Senate bill www.lwv.org. The politics of health care reform is contentious: as of this writing it is not a done deal. The public option, mandated coverage, abortion, taxing "Cadillac" plans, Medicare cuts, cost containment and immigration are just a few of the contentious issues.

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The January 2010 Kaiser Health Tracking Poll (www.kff.org), taken before the Massachusetts primary, shows Americans equally divided on health care reform. However, "...most Americans would react positively to the bulk of the provisions in the health reform proposals, even as awareness of some of the legislation's key selling points remain limited." Also, "Views on the proposed legislation are indelibly partisan."

Health Care Reform and Illinois

The bills currently in Congress have potential to affect states in myriad ways, as financing and expansion of Medicaid, insurance reform. While there are a number of state health programs, it is not clear how they would be affected by federal legislation.

HB 3254 Reproductive Health and Access

A bill will be reintroduced this session, providing for a broad range of reproductive health services, including expanded family planning services, emergency contraception, improved financial access and prevention of unintended pregnancies through comprehensive sex education. LWVIL is a coalition member in the Campaign for Reproductive Choice and Access, joining over 20 health, educational, civic and religious organizations supporting the bill. www.illinoisreproductivehealth.org/coalition.shtml.

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