

Senate Republicans announce MI Health plan to help Michigans 1.2 million uninsured

Thursday, May 14, 2009

LANSING—Senate Republicans today unveiled a comprehensive plan that will help make health insurance in the state affordable and accessible for uninsured Michigan residents, said Sen. Tom George, M.D., lead sponsor of the legislation.

George said the *MI Health* package is an innovative approach that provides consumer protections and has the potential to cover half of the more than 1.2 million uninsured people in the state.

“*MI Health* is a bridge for the working uninsured from government assistance to health care independence,” said George, R–Kalamazoo. “Importantly, it protects consumers from losing coverage if they get sick. It also includes a re-insurance mechanism that partially relieves Blue Cross Blue Shield of its burden.”



Central to the plan are its two programs to expand coverage for the uninsured. MI Access covers uninsured patients earning under 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, while MI Coverage protects those earning between 200 and 300 percent of that level.

MI Health is the result of a series of bipartisan workgroup meetings commissioned by Senate Majority Leader Michael D. Bishop last winter and led by Sen. George, chairman of the Senate Health Policy Committee.

“The Senate Republican *MI Health* plan is about helping provide affordable, accessible health care to hundreds of thousands of Michigan residents,” Bishop said. “We will continue to seek the input and work together with experts in the health care field—the insurance carriers, the hospitals, physicians, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and Michigan business owners and job providers to develop the best plan.”

The workgroup held several meetings across the state over four months and consulted with numerous stakeholders in the health field, including: Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan; commercial carriers; health plans; physicians; hospitals; seniors; patients and consumers; disability advocates; business owners and job providers; unions; and the Office of Financial and Insurance Regulation.

Eric Schneidewind, state president of the AARP, spoke enthusiastically of the MI Health plan.

“AARP’s top priority is making health care available to all Michigan citizens. Today’s announcement is a major step toward that goal,” said Schneidewind. “We want to thank Sen. George for his leadership in bringing stakeholders together over the last four months to work for a better health care system. We look forward to working with Sen. George in a bipartisan effort to provide quality health care at a cost that is affordable to our members.”

Paul Spaude, president and chief executive officer of Borgess Health and Borgess Medical Center, said he appreciates the workgroup’s efforts.

“Health care coverage and access is a serious issue for our state and nation,” said Spaude. “Borgess applauds the efforts of Sen. George to introduce legislation that addresses this important issue. While we have not analyzed the specifics of this legislative package we look forward to the opportunity to share our perspective and hearing from others. Borgess strongly supports efforts to achieve 100 percent access and 100 percent coverage for health care and will work with Sen. George and others to achieve this goal.”

George said the focus of the Senate Republican *MI Health* plan is addressing the growing number of Michigan’s uninsured residents.

“The input of stakeholders was invaluable,” said George, one of two physicians in the Senate. “It led to a more carefully crafted proposal that works to address the needs of our residents. It will expand access to care while also encouraging individuals to participate in maintaining their own health.”

Senate Bills 579 – 582 have been referred to the Senate Health Policy Committee.