

Step Toward Universal Health Care in NY

by AP-News

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) -- Gov. Eliot Spitzer said the state will commission an independent research group to help New York develop a universal health coverage plan.

The Department of Health and the Insurance Department will award the \$470,000 contract to the Urban Institute, an independent, nonpartisan policy research group, to analyze proposals and develop a "strategic roadmap" to universal health insurance.

Health Department officials said the Urban Institute would receive a two-year contract, but officials in the governor's office expect the group to begin work by March 1 and to have a final recommendation to Spitzer by next summer.

The contract must be approved by state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli.

"There is arguably no better use of state resources than making sure New Yorkers are healthy," Spitzer said Tuesday in a written statement. "We expect to model proposals that will enable us to reach that goal."

Assembly Health Committee Chair Richard Gottfried is expected to announce a universal health coverage proposal for New York state. He said his proposal could save voters \$4 billion annually, but how the system would be paid for was unclear Tuesday.

Earlier this year, the governor charged the health and insurance departments with developing universal health proposals. The analysis will include proposals to provide universal health coverage through public and private mechanisms.

The Urban Institute was one of eight organizations that responded to the Department of Health's competitive request for consultant services for this project.

The state has conducted public hearings throughout the state to solicit input on proposals for reforming the health care system, improving access to insurance and determining how universal coverage can become reality in New York. The eighth and final hearing will be held Wednesday in Old Westbury, Long Island.

About 2.5 million people in New York state are uninsured, according to officials in Gottfried's office.

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