

Florida Governor Signs Health Care Bill That Allows Insurers To Sell Bare-Bones Health Plans

by Medical-News-Today

Florida Gov. Charlie Crist (R) on Wednesday signed into law a bill that will allow the sale of low-cost, bare-bones health insurance policies, the New York Times reports (Sack, New York Times, 5/22). Under the "Cover Florida" plan, residents ages 19 to 64 will be able to purchase limited health coverage for as little as \$150 per month. Insurers offering such plans will be exempt from state mandates requiring coverage for a range of items and procedures (Kaiser Daily Health Policy Report, 5/6). However, the plans will be required to include coverage for some conditions, such as diabetes (Caputo/Wyss, Miami Herald, 5/22). The policies will cover preventive care and office visits but not care from specialists or long-term hospitalizations (Kaiser Daily Health Policy Report, 5/6). Insurance companies also will be required to offer two plans: a catastrophic health plan and one that does not include catastrophic coverage. The scope of the benefits offered under the plans has not yet been finalized. The Cover Florida plans could be available by January 2009 (Miami Herald, 5/22). The law also will allocate \$1.5 million to establish a corporation to help businesses with fewer than 50 employees negotiate health insurance rates, as well as handle premiums and claims (Kaiser Daily Health Policy Report, 5/6). In addition, the law sets a minimum number of days for a hospital stay after childbirth, includes some types of transplants and extends the age a child can remain on a parents coverage to age 30 (Royse, AP/Miami Herald, 5/21).

Reducing Health Care Costs The Times also examined how states' "bold ideas of recent years" for expanding health coverage "have been swept away by a worrisome economy, leaving incrementalism and caution in their stead." Florida's law represents "a common thread in state capitals this spring, as governors and lawmakers struggle to respond to broad anxiety about health care within the limitations of deeply strained budgets," the Times reports. In some states, "the focus is shifting from covering the uninsured to lowering the cost of health care," according to the Times. Crist, who noted that the Florida budget was reduced to \$66 billion this year from \$72 billion last year, said, "The economy is in a different place right now," adding, "Our obligation is to find a way without tax dollars to still provide better health care for our people." Laura Tobler, a health policy analyst for the National Conference of State Legislatures, said, "To create successful coverage strategies, historically states have had to ante up," adding, "But more than half of states are reporting shortfalls. So there hasn't been as much activity this year as the last two, and the activity we have seen has been of the regulatory nature, which costs less money" (New York Times, 5/22).

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