

New York businesses to feel pain of proposed health insurance bill, expert says

By Keith L. Martin

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A proposed plan by New York Gov. David Paterson to expand health care coverage to those up to age 29 on their parents' plans will have less of an impact on the insurance industry than it does on individual businesses, according to a health care expert.

Dr. Sury Anand, president and CEO of New York, N.Y.-based Atlantis Health Plan, said from an insurance standpoint, the demographic of 19- to 29-year-olds, proposed for coverage under Paterson's plan, are not considered a high-risk pool.



Dr. Sury Anand

"So I think the insurance industry will absorb the change, the bigger burden is definitely for employers," Anand told IFAwebnews.com. "I don't think the insurance industry as a whole would consider this a high-risk situation."

Atlantis Health Plans, a subsidiary of Atlantis Health Systems, was organized by 12 New York doctors and is the only physician-owned and -operated health plan in the state, offering various plans to employers, sole proprietors, individuals and others. The company offers health coverage, including preventative care, to New Yorkers who live or work in the five boroughs.

On Wednesday, during his State of the State speech, Paterson outlined three key issues for the upcoming legislative session, including strengthening New York's health care system.

As part of that initiative, Paterson said he will introduce legislation to address the one in three New Yorkers between the ages of 19 and 29 who are uninsured. The legislation would allow families to cover dependents up through the age of 29 in their family coverage plans at their own cost. Currently, family members are typically covered up to age 18 if they are not enrolled in college, and age 22 if they are enrolled.

Paterson said this legislation is particularly important as the state faces a recession in which 225,000 New Yorkers could lose their jobs and subsequently, their health insurance.

Anand said that he is still waiting to see the "fine print" of the legislation to address issues such as coverage for the policyholder's grandchildren and what happens if the dependent's employer does not offer health insurance.

While Paterson's office is billing the plan as a move closer to universal health care in New York, Anand called the proposed legislation "a small, but definite step toward mandatory coverage."

"Mandatory coverage will be a critical step toward universal health care," Anand said. "What we are finding is that the sick are looking for short-term coverage and that upsets the insurance concept of spreading risk. We need to head towards mandatory coverage if we want universal health care."

Another key concept to mandatory coverage, he said, is affordability and controlling medical costs.

"The key to affordability is cost control," he said. "If we can keep premiums down and pass the savings onto customers, that is part of mandatory coverage."