

News from the state capitol: Health care bills now in effect

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Wednesday, July 1 marks the day a number of new laws spearheaded by Democrats go into effect. Greeley's representative, Jim Riesberg, has led the legislative efforts on four of these bills that aim to make healthcare more affordable.

Rep. Riesberg's Colorado Health Care Affordability Act is the most significant health care reform legislation in Colorado in four decades. When fully implemented, House Bill 1293 will provide health coverage to more than 100,000 uninsured Coloradans and reduce uncompensated care and cost shifting.

No new patients will be accepted through this program until the federal agencies grant their approval—a change that is expected early next year. This bill was a key piece in Governor Ritter's legislative agenda.

"This is a Colorado solution to a Colorado problem," said Rep. Riesberg. "Whether or not Washington is able to fix our broken health care system, here at home, we can make huge strides toward making health care more affordable for all."

Senate Bill 26 (with Sen. Suzanne Williams) will prevent sub-par athletic trainers from misrepresenting themselves to clients by requiring them to be qualified to work with athletes in the identification, treatment, and prevention of injuries. This legislation assures a licensed athletic trainer will have at least a BA degree from an accredited athletic training program and will have passed a national competency examination. Athletic trainers work under the direction of a physician with sports teams and in specialized clinics.

Senate Bill 239 (with Sen. Lois Tochtrop) significantly updates the state's Nurse Practice Act. Now, nurses will be able to provide more medical services and prescribe medications. As nurses are paid less than doctors, these changes will help keep health care costs down.

In order to receive prescriptive authority, an Advanced Practice Nurses (APN) must have a graduate degree in a nursing specialty, complete a structured post-graduate mentorship of at least 1,800 hours, be national certified and obtain professional liability insurance. APNs must also establish collaborative agreements with physicians. The bill also creates a group to support

collaboration and communication between the practices of nurses and physicians.

Rep. Riesberg said, “Sometimes, it’s these little things that make a big difference. Few citizens outside the capitol paid attention to the Nurse Practice Act, but this could have big implications for patients and bill-payers across the state. By expanding the care that they are legally able to provide, advanced practice nurses can now provide more care, in more communities, for less money.”

Lastly, SB 251 (with Sen. Chris Romer) permits optometrists and physicians to prescribe and sell a new trend in eye-care drug-releasing contact lenses. Under current law, optometrists and physicians may prescribe and dispense drugs, however only pharmacies may legally sell drugs.

As of Wednesday, patients will not have to go back and forth—from the optometrist to get a prescription, to the pharmacy to pick up the lenses, back to the optometrist to get the lenses fitted. A doctor can do it all in one appointment. This saves consumers both time and money.