

Policy Examiner

Dispatches about the Colorado Commission on Affordable Health Care



Panel Continues Organizational Work; Busy Travel Schedule Debated

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Next year will be a busy one for the Colorado Commission on Affordable Health Care, with an ambitious schedule that may take the members to public hearings all across the state.

Commissioners discussed their work plan at their fourth meeting on November 10, but they did not settle on a schedule.

The panel's leader expressed worries that the \$400,000 budget would quickly be depleted on staffing contracts, leaving little for travel costs to visit rural Colorado.

The legislature established the commission and gave it three years to make recommendations for lowering health care costs. Its interim reports are due in November 2015 and 2016.

Although the group began meeting in August, it has not begun substantive discussions about health care costs. Instead, the first four meetings have been taken up with organizational tasks, such as passing bylaws, figuring out staffing requirements and determining a scope of work.

Cindy Sovine-Miller, a member of the commission's interim planning committee, proposed a schedule for 2015 that would take the group on the road for listening sessions in each of Colorado's seven congressional districts.

Other commissioners said the public hearings might leave too little time to write an interim report to the legislature by November. But Sovine-Miller argued for an extensive public outreach schedule in the first year, to show legislators and the public that the commission is taking a thoughtful approach to its task.

"It does not seem like this group is in a place yet where we can start making recommendations," Sovine-Miller said. "It makes sense to listen first."

Commissioner Marcy Morrison said people have been

Online Plans

Read proposed public hearing plans and a possible scope of work on the Affordable Care Commission's website:

www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/CCAHC

inundated with studies, surveys and listening sessions about health care. The commission's public hearings would be more useful if the group put forward proposals to get public reaction, she said.

Commissioner Elisabeth Arenales agreed. She said the state Division of Insurance has made a detailed study of high insurance costs in the mountain resort counties, and this commission needs to absorb that work before it goes back to those counties and starts asking more questions.

Staff Needed to Keep Commission Running

Public hearings outside Denver are difficult to arrange, and it will take a paid staff, said Bill Lindsay, the group's interim chairman. Lindsay is leading the effort to contract with staff for administrative work and data analysis.

He thinks staffing costs for such work could exhaust the commission's budget during its second year. That's without considering the costs of lodging and transportation for commissioners to attend public meetings far from Denver.

The commission could raise funds to cover additional costs. It could also ask for more from the legislature.

"I think we have to be assertive about this with the legislature," said Commissioner Dorothy Ann Perry. "If they want a quality outcome, they're going to have to pay for it."