

Submitted on Thursday, December 13, 2018

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Comment:

The proposed increase in the One Care budget alone (they are asking for \$257 million more than they spent last year) is more than is needed to create a publicly financed universal primary care system that could provide every Vermonter with primary care, outpatient mental health and outpatient substance abuse with no out of pocket costs. (Source: Cost Estimates for Universal Primary Care, 12/16/15, Agency of Administration, Health Care Reform).

Every dollar that is spent on health care ultimately comes from us – whether it is from our taxes or our premiums. So, why not utilize those funds to increase access? A publicly financed primary system could be the first phase of such an effort. It would actually lower costs in the long run – people would no longer delay care due to out of pocket expenses. Their health care needs could be addressed before they were more serious, dangerous and costly to the system as a whole.

It is hard to understand why the Green Mountain Care Board thinks that experimenting with different payment systems to providers is at the heart of health care reform. It is not objectionable to experiment and try a payment scheme other than fee for service. But whether one pays providers fee for service, salaries, capitated payments, or any other payment scheme, has never been shown to have a huge impact on either access to health care or its cost. In fact, this has nothing to do with access.

To understand this, all one has to do is look at other countries with universal access. They all have a variety of payment systems (capitated payments, fee for service, salaries, etc.). None of these is the magic formula. What really counts is that they have universal access and that health care is a public good. Most other countries have some kind of single payer or equivalent, so that the price of health care services is also regulated and this keeps costs down as well.

So, rather than continue to spend tens of millions of dollars on payment reform, why don't we invest in publicly financed health care for all? We can start with Universal Primary Care; one year of Universal Primary Care in Vermont will cost less than the proposed increase in One Care's budget for next year!