

Idaho Academy of Family Physicians

2017 Legislative Update - Week 2

The Week Ending January 20, 2017

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This second week of the 2017 legislature was relatively quiet in terms of health and physician-related issues, as the committees continued to review and approve rules as described in last week's report. Of interest, were a couple of presentations from Idaho's insurance exchange, and a report on immunizations.

Your Health Idaho Annual Report to the Legislature

Pat Kelly, Executive Director, of Your Health Idaho (YHI), the state's health insurance exchange, delivered his required annual report to the Health and Welfare Committee's this week. He emphasized the mission of YHI, which is to maintain maximum control of Idaho's insurance marketplace at minimal cost to its citizens. 2015 marked the year that YHI was the first exchange in the country to transition from the federal healthcare.gov to its own technology. It remains the only exchange to have done so to date. 2016 was YHI's third open enrollment, and the most successful to date. More than 95,000 Idahoans have purchased coverage through YHI, which puts it second in the nation in per-capita enrollment, and first in per-capita enrollment in all state-based marketplaces.

2016 was also a year of financial stability. YHI was able to pay for operations using their assessment fee revenue – this is important in that the state does not pay for any aspect of YHI.

Last year also marked the integration of their customer support center which previously had been accomplished in partnership with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. YHI also introduced mandatory training for insurance agents this year. They have seen a 75% improvement in responses to customer inquiries and a 50 % drop in the volume of appeals.

Mr. Kelly reported that 87% of YHI customers receive a tax credit, and 60% of those enrolled through YHI are under 45 years of age.

He emphasized that the unique model Idaho has built offers a great foundation for reform in the uncertain future of the Affordable Care Act under the new administration throughout 2017.

The Value of Immunizations

Director Dick Armstrong and Dr. Christine Hahn (State Epidemiologist) gave a presentation to the Health and Welfare Committees about Immunizations and Immunization Waivers. Director Armstrong highlighted the fact that, over the years, the United States has taken the lead on life expectancy. However, 2015 marked the first time in which the U.S. ranked second in life expectancy – next to Japan. This presentation largely addressed the fact that increased amounts of vaccinations have had a wide-ranging positive effect (in the form of downward trends in other health risk areas) in all areas of U.S. health.

There was also specific talk of the varying forms of immunization waivers, which are medical, religious, and philosophical (personal) exemptions. While everyone in the room acknowledged the uncertainty of health under the new administration, Richard explicitly warned against going down the same route as California by taking away more exemptions.

As many of you may be aware, there is a small but fairly vocal group of anti-vaccine activists who have stepped up their presence at the legislature in recent years, and I suspect this presentation was arranged as a result of those efforts.

On the schedule:

The Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee has scheduled their “Health and Human Services Week” for January 30 – February 3. This is the week in which the Health and human services agencies make their budget requests and presentations to the budget committee. We will cover this closely and provide some detail on those hearings.

If you have questions regarding a piece of legislation or you would like the IAFP to monitor specific legislation that is not currently being monitored, please contact Neva Santos, IAFP Executive Director at Idahoafp@aol.com or (208) 323-1156.