

## Health Care Reform

### The Issue

The issue of health care reform will be one of the key matters taken up during the 2009 session of the West Virginia Legislature. Lawmakers will be considering a number of reform recommendations that have been developed as part of a statewide task force initiative — “Roadmap to Health Project.” The goals of the Roadmap to Health Project are to address three key issues regarding health care in West Virginia: (1) making health care more affordable; (2) improving the quality of health care; and (3) increasing access to health care for the uninsured. The Chamber supports many of the report’s recommendations, particularly those that involve encouraging health care prevention, expanding health information technology and providing health insurance incentives.

### Background

As part of a special legislative interim study effort, the Legislature and Vision Shared spearheaded a year-long study of health care reform and health care issues. The effort, called “Roadmap to Health Project,” culminated in the preparation of a report that has been provided to legislative leaders and Governor Manchin. The overarching goal of the recommendations from the Roadmap to Health Project is to improve West Virginia’s ability to identify and care for chronically ill patients, thereby bringing efficiency and savings to health care spending.

Among some of the key health care reform recommendations contained in the report are:

- Implementing pilot programs for the team-based coordination of health care, involving the use of “patient centered medical homes” and “community health teams,” resulting in the creation of new health care jobs and the need for additional job training.
- Increasing access to health care for the uninsured, including tax credits for small businesses (up to 50 percent of the coverage cost) that do not currently provide health coverage to employees.
- Increasing wellness and prevention efforts, including an increase in the state’s tax on tobacco products and requiring nutrition labeling on chain restaurant menus.
- Improving health information technology through creating incentives to increase the use of electronic medical records and setting a single common pathway for health information exchange.
- Streamlining procedures for provider credentialing and prior authorization.

The report also presents some preliminary recommendations for expanding access to health care through a universal wellness benefit and tax credits for small businesses to acquire health insurance.

### The Chamber’s Position

The West Virginia Chamber of Commerce has endorsed the “Roadmap to Health Project” report and encourages lawmakers to give its many recommendations serious consideration. In particular, the Chamber urges lawmakers to enact tax credits for small businesses as a way to encourage more employers to offer or maintain private-sector health insurance coverage options.