

Introduction

POLICY FORUM

What Does Health Reform Mean for North Carolina?

On March 23, 2010, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) was signed into law by President Obama. This legislation is the most influential, comprehensive piece of health care reform that has been passed in over 50 years. This complex and lengthy piece of legislation was built in an atmosphere of controversy and heated debates. Its passage took months of hearings and debates as Congress considered many competing proposals that were melded into a compromise package that, even as it passed, had to be reconsidered through the reconciliation process. Even after its passage, 14 state Attorneys General announced they would sue to block its implementation.

The passage of PPACA was not easy but was made possible by the urgency of the need to address three core problems with our health care system in the United States: access, quality, and cost. Those three issues provide the organizing themes for this special issue of the *North Carolina Medical Journal*.

Access: This past year, almost 50 million Americans lacked health insurance coverage. Through the use of health insurance exchanges, Medicaid expansion, tax incentives for employer-based insurance coverage, individual mandates, and subsidies for low-income individuals, PPACA attempts to expand access to coverage to 32 million of Americans by 2019.

Quality: PPACA will address quality improvement through investments in preventive medicine, comparative effective research, and the use of health care data to guide decision-makers on improving quality and outcomes. The legislation will drive the system to greater transparency by making data readily available to the general public so they can make informed decision about their health care. This will help drive quality improvement as consumers and purchasers see what they are buying and select the highest value and best quality of care.

Costs: The first questions that many people ask about the health reform bill are usually about cost. How much is health reform going to cost? Will it contain spiraling health care costs? Will it curb our spending? The Congressional Budget Office estimates that PPACA will cost \$938 billion over the next decade. However, the good news is that due to new revenues, reduced costs of care from market pressures, and cuts to certain programs, the cost of PPACA will be covered and then some. PPACA will promote cost containment by testing new models of delivering and organizing health care, as well as through investments in health information technology including the promotion and implementation of electronic medical records.

Like most Americans, you probably have questions about how health reform will affect you and your family. This issue of the *Journal* is dedicated to explaining PPACA in more detail and describing how it will affect individuals, providers, employers, the insurance industry, communities, and the state of North Carolina. This issue also includes information about an array of funding opportunities that are available to organizations, institutions, and government agencies. Future issues of the *North Carolina Medical Journal* will feature individual contributions by various stakeholders in the state who will describe how health reform will affect their particular industry. This is our way of keeping the conversation alive and fostering the debate over how best to implement reform. In addition, we welcome letters to the editor describing how health reform is affecting you.

With this current collection of commentaries from authors in various sectors—medicine, public health, law, government, and beyond—we hope to broaden your understanding of this massive and monumental piece of legislation.

Thomas C. Ricketts III, PhD, MPH
Editor-in-Chief

Christine Nielsen, MPH
Managing Editor