

Medicaid Matters

Legislation allowing state flexibility essential to effective health reform

While no consensus on health reform is likely before Congress takes its August break, there is widespread agreement among state Medicaid directors that “one-size-fits-all” Medicaid expansions and unfunded mandates will be devastating to cash-strapped states.



From right, Commissioner Carol Steckel, CMS Central Office Director Cindy Mann, CMS Chief Operating Officer Charlene Frizzera, and NASMD Director Ann Kohler.

Alabama Medicaid Commissioner Carol Steckel, who also serves as chair of the National Association of State Medicaid Directors, is hopeful that states will be allowed flexibility under health reform to manage their respective Medicaid programs without heavy intrusion from the federal government.

Steckel and several other state Medicaid directors met in July with Cindy Mann, newly-appointed director of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Central Office, to review pending health reform legislation. Because

each state operates its Medicaid program independently, health reform affects each state in different ways, according to Steckel.

“What works in Alabama may not work in New Jersey. And a per capita income of \$30,000 in Alabama is much different than \$30,000 in New Jersey. So, to come in and just do across-the-board minimums or maximums — I don’t think this is a very good way to do it,” she said. “I think they need to let the states determine how to manage their programs, and how to best provide for their citizens.”

Steckel explained that during the presidential campaign, there was significant talk about “letting the market place” work in the health care sector. “When it comes to Medicaid, however, our hands are often tied by federal regulations and legislation that does not allow us to be as effective as we could be. [Read more >>](#)

Together For Quality’s progress featured in national publication

Alabama’s *Together for Quality* initiative is in the national spotlight this month as a featured case study in *Quality Matters*, an online newsletter published July 23 by The Commonwealth Fund. Entitled, “Alabama’s Together for Quality Program – Putting Health IT to Work for Medicaid Beneficiaries,” the in-depth case study explores the project’s vision, implementation and lessons learned thus far.

The Commonwealth Fund is a private foundation that aims to promote a high performing health care system that achieves better access, improved quality, and greater efficiency, particularly for society’s most vulnerable, including low-income people, the uninsured, minority Americans, young children, and elderly adults. [Read the case study >>](#)



- ◆ **TFQ puts Alabama ahead of other states on HIT planning**
- ◆ **Committee begins work on long-term care recommendations**
- ◆ **Steckel selected for inaugural Medicaid Leadership Institute**

TFQ puts Alabama ahead of other states on HIT planning

Alabama Medicaid's *Together for Quality* initiative has come a long way since its inception two years ago and as a result, Alabama is ahead of other states in planning for health information technology (HIT) activities.

Medicaid Commissioner Carol Steckel told members of the TFQ Stakeholder Council on July 15 that now is the time to take the TFQ vision to the next level with the help of the funds from the federal stimulus program, also known as the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009.



"I'm not sure you understand just how exciting the work you have done is, but Alabama is leading the nation in terms of using technology to deliver better health care at a lower cost and we couldn't have done it without you," the commissioner told the stakeholders. [Read more >>](#)

Committee begins work on long-term care recommendations



Commissioner Carol Steckel (right) chairs LTC Rebalancing Committee.

A newly appointed committee of state agency representatives, legislative officials, consumer advocates and provider association executives began work July 10 to develop innovative ideas and recommendations that they hope will lead to a continuum of care system that allows the elderly and disabled to live at the most appropriate level of care.

The Long-Term Care Rebalancing Committee was formed after the passage of Senate Joint Resolution 84 during the 2009 Legislative Session. Senator Linda Coleman, D-Birmingham, a longtime advocate for a continuum of long term care services, sponsored the resolution to focus attention on how to better care for the elderly and disabled in the state and

how the state can successfully provide resources to family members and recipients. The committee is to submit recommendations to the Alabama Legislature by the 10th day of the 2010 legislative session. [Read more >>](#)

Medicaid commissioner selected for Medicaid Leadership Institute

Governor Bob Riley announced June 24 that Alabama Medicaid Commissioner Carol H. Steckel is one of six state Medicaid directors chosen to participate in the inaugural class of the Medicaid Leadership Institute. The Institute, launched by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, will enhance the leadership capacity of states' Medicaid directors so their programs can serve as national models for high-quality, cost-effective care.

"I'm proud that Alabama's Medicaid commissioner has been selected to participate in this national Institute and share with the rest of the country what we've learned in Alabama," Governor Riley said. "This is a critical time for Medicaid programs across the country. We must be more efficient and innovative than ever before. It certainly says something very positive about our Medicaid program that Commissioner Steckel was chosen for this honor." [Read more >>](#)

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