

# Americans must have health insurance

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But it would make major changes: Individuals and employers would face new obligations to help pay for coverage. Insurers would operate under stricter consumer protections. And the government would take added responsibilities for setting insurance rules and providing financial help to low- and middle-income families.

Momentum for a health care overhaul built this week after Obama obtained a pledge from medical providers to help find \$2 trillion in savings over 10 years to help pay for his plan.

Even before any legislation has been officially introduced, lawmakers are grappling with dozens of thorny issues. On Thursday, senators debated behind closed doors whether their bill should include the choice of a government insurance plan for middle-income families. Insurers, hospitals and

employers are trying to head off such a plan. The issue won't be resolved any time soon.

The House document also calls for a new government insurance plan to compete with private companies. It would be financed by premium payments, not taxpayer dollars.

Insurers are strongly opposed to a government-sponsored plan, saying it would drive them out of business. Democrats say a public plan would help everybody by injecting competition into a health care market that in many areas is dominated by a handful of major insurers.

The summary of the House proposal says one of its main goals is to "minimize disruption" for people who already have coverage by allowing them to keep their coverage. All Americans would be protected by an annual limit on out-of-pocket

costs, a safeguard already in the best private plans.

Individuals would be required to get coverage, either through an employer or government plan, or on their own. Employers would be required to provide coverage or pay the government a percentage of payroll.

Individual subsidies for health insurance would be offered on a sliding scale to those earning up to four times the federal poverty level, or \$88,200 for a family of four, according to the document.

The Energy and Commerce plan broadly tracks with the health care proposals that Obama outlined during the campaign. But in several areas, it goes further than what the Senate is likely to approve. For example, while there appears to be support in the Senate for requiring individuals to get coverage, an employer requirement might not get through.

The House summary does not include any cost estimates, but independent experts have put the price tag for such a plan at \$1.2 trillion to \$1.5 trillion over 10 years, with some estimates ranging as high as \$1.7 trillion.

The president has proposed a down payment of \$634 billion over 10 years to pay for expanding coverage, money obtained through a 50-50 mix of tax increases and spending cuts. Obama is also promising to hold hospitals, doctors, drug makers and other providers to their recent offer of \$2 trillion in savings over 10 years.

The House plan would set up an insurance purchasing pool called an "exchange" to help make private coverage more affordable for individuals and small businesses. In its first year, the exchange would be open only to employers with fewer than 10 workers.

## Organization meets to discuss swine flu vaccine

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this virus in a mild, moderate, or catastrophic form and we would have absolutely nothing."

Most flu vaccine companies can only make one vaccine at a time: seasonal flu vaccine or pandemic vaccine. Production takes months and it is impossible to switch halfway through if health officials make a mistake.

Vaccine makers can make limited amounts of both seasonal flu vaccine and pandemic vaccine — though not at the same time — but they cannot make massive quantities of both because that exceeds

manufacturing capacity.

"What is really going to be wrestled with is that seasonal influenza itself has a signifi-

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**ALL JR - OWNER/APPLICANT/LICENSEE**  
**OWNER/APPLICANT**