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Letters to the Editor
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To the Editor:

As the New York State Legislature works in earnest on the state budget, it needs to address the issue of affordability in health care.

We've made progress in providing New Yorkers access to health care—recent reports show more than 2.7 million previously uninsured New Yorkers now have coverage as a result of state initiatives under the Affordable Care Act. Yet, as this landmark law heads toward its sixth anniversary we still haven't begun to address the cost of coverage, as 2014 health care cost data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services illustrates:

- U.S. health care spending topped three trillion dollars, a 5.3% jump from 2013.
- Spending on prescription drugs increased 12.2%.
- Medicaid prescription expenditures grew 24.3%, up from a 4.2% in 2013, largely due to increased enrollment and spending for drugs that treat hepatitis C.

It's now time to “bend the cost curve,” as the ACA promised back in 2010. Lawmakers should embrace efforts that will curb underlying health care costs and improve affordability overall:

- **Reform New York's Rate Setting Process**—The Department of Financial Services has repeatedly used its authority to artificially suppress premium increases to “below the average increase in health care costs.” This practice threatens plans' financial stability and, by extension, consumers' access to care, as evidenced by the recent Health Republic collapse. Lawmakers must take a closer look at DFS's unfettered power and impose legislative solutions for better oversight of the department.
- **Taxes on Health Care**—New Yorkers currently pay more than five billion dollars in health care taxes through various Health Care Reform Act (HCRA) surcharges and assessments, premium taxes and taxes imposed by the ACA. Collectively, these taxes represent five percent of premium. A guaranty fund, as proposed by hospitals and providers in response to the Health Republic failure, is simply one more health care tax that would further harm consumers.
- **Health Care Cost Transparency**—Because currently only health care premiums are subject to review and approval, consumers have no information about the actual cost of various health care components such as hospital or doctor charges and drug prices that ultimately determine premiums. Consumers need and deserve basic pricing information for health care services.
- **Quality Information**—Along with cost information, consumers who continue to take a more active role in their health care choices need the ability to measure provider quality. Health plans are measured—nationally and at the state level—on quality of care and consumer satisfaction standards. Little information is available on quality delivered by providers.

Efforts that threaten affordability also threaten access. Lawmakers must be mindful of the impact their actions have on the ability of New Yorkers to afford health coverage. Affordability must be the cornerstone of any health policy discussions in New York.

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