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**“Let’s Cover as Many People as We Can”**  
**Consumer Advocates React to Governor’s Scaled-back Health Insurance Plan**

(Harrisburg, PA) Governor Rendell’s scaled-back plan to provide subsidies for low-income purchasers of health insurance has drawn a variety of reactions from consumer advocates.

Foremost is distress over how the proposed expansion of adultBasic to 90,000 individuals falls far short of the need. The number of uninsured adults has increased to almost 900,000 and is growing. Meanwhile, the waiting list for adultBasic is approaching 200,000. Getting health insurance to these individuals should be a top priority for the General Assembly.

John Dodds, executive director of the Philadelphia Unemployment Project, highlighted the fact that the Governor continues to push for an expansion of adultBasic. “Let’s cover as many people as we can, given fiscal realities. We can use federal dollars to double the number insured. And by adding prescription drug coverage, we will help people avoid serious illnesses and expensive medical procedures. It’s unconscionable the General Assembly hasn’t taken this step long ago.”

“Medical providers will get most of the money in the end,” said Dodds. “We’re fine with that. What we object to is a plan that ignores consumers’ need for cost-effective treatment like prescription drug coverage and instead funnels money to hospitals and doctors to provide acute care to the uninsured. That’s wasteful and ends up hurting people.”

Marissa Harris, advocacy developer for Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, said her group carries a broad range of concerns related to the budget. “We recognize that vital programs are going to be cut. Given all the pain those cuts will cause, we’re prepared to adjust our expectations for health care. But we strongly support using federal funds to cover more of the uninsured.”

Complicating the picture is the growing surplus (\$700 million at last count) in the Health Care Provider Retention Account. Last session, lobbyists representing hospitals and physicians laid claim to the entire surplus and spurned efforts by Rendell to negotiate a plan whereby a portion would have been used to expand coverage among the uninsured.

“It will be interesting to see how the medical establishment reacts to the Governor’s plan,” said Berry Friesen, public affairs manager of the Pennsylvania Health Access Network (PHAN). “Will it continue to assert an entitlement to the funds in that account, despite the fiscal crisis confronting state government? Or will our medical leaders find their way to supporting shared sacrifice?”

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