

## Health care commission ready to report to the legislature

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January 24, 2008

Yellow dots blanket a small, bluish map of Greeley in Mark Wallace's hands.

### WEB EXTRAS



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A member of Gov. Bill Ritter's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Health Care Reform, Wallace pulls that map out often to illustrate the problem of Colorado's uninsured: Health care is not just a poor-person's problem.

Each dot on the map, reminiscent of those old population maps in high school geography, represents a person who has sought health care assistance -- and a plethora of dots cover the map in all Greeley zip codes.

"My neighborhood is on here," said Wallace, president of the Northern Colorado Health Alliance and also the executive director of the Weld County Department of Public Health and Environment. "There are people here whose neighborhoods have values that are extremely high.

"It's not all about people living in the red zone and who have the highest poverty. There are people in Colorado who make \$75,000 and don't have health insurance."

Wallace and other commission members, Edie Sonn of Denver and Elisabeth Arenales, health care program director for the Colorado Center on Law and Policy, discussed the proposed ideas for reform with The Tribune's editorial board on Wednesday.

The commission, charged last year with coming up with ways to ensure all residents can have access to affordable health care, will make its final report to the Legislature on Jan. 31. After months of meetings throughout the state, the group will present five recommendations to the Legislature that could require from \$389 million to \$1.1 billion extra in annual state health care funding. At present, the state puts roughly \$3 billion a year into health care. The total annual health care spending in Colorado is at \$30.1 billion, which includes public and private, individual and employer. Employer-worker health care plans, however, make up most of that pie, at almost \$12 billion.

The plans all vary in their exact workings, but most of the commission's recommendations come from the fifth plan, which the commission built from elements of the first four.

That plan recommends all legal residents of Colorado be required to have minimum insurance coverage, and include elements that would increase public funding for the poor and expand eligibility for public programs, lower costs of health insurance and provide sliding fee scales for low-income workers, reduce administrative expenses and encourage healthy living, to name a few. The plans call

for graduated approaches to fully work, which could take years.

Some who viewed the plans may think they don't quite put all people on the same scale. They say Colorado's health plans can't be a one-size-fits-all approach, and that they must recognize there are just some people who cannot afford health insurance and need extra help.

"It's just not reasonable to say they have to pay into the system," Wallace said. "And there are others who have the ability to pay and should continue to pay."

Wallace said the Legislature will have to decide how to pay for the plans. But, he added, society can pay now, or pay more later. At present, he said, Colorado families are paying from \$900-\$1,000 more per year in premiums to pay for the state's uninsured. The premiums rise every year.

"Doing nothing is expensive," Wallace explained. "Doing what we're doing today will cost us more in the long run. ... It is going to be about saying what we want. Do we wait until things are advanced and push the costs onto our kids? Shared responsibility is the key."

### **More online**

» Download the commission's recommendations at [www.colorado.gov/208commission](http://www.colorado.gov/208commission).

» To see a pdf that further explains some of the commission's recommendations, go to [www.greeleytribune.com](http://www.greeleytribune.com).

### **What's next?**

Colorado's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Health Care Reform will present five recommendations to the Legislature at noon Jan. 31 in the Old Supreme Court Building chambers at the Capitol. From there, legislators will likely craft bills to achieve such reform.

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