

***Insurance Times:*** Aetna promotes genetic testing

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HARTFORD AP) — Aetna is promoting genetic testing for early disease detection and is calling on other health plans to back federal legislation that would prohibit discrimination based on test results.

"I believe that there is a pressing need for the health insurance industry to establish guidelines for covering genetic testing in a way that promotes disease prevention and disease management, while at the same time respecting members' privacy," Aetna chief executive Dr. John W. Rowe said.

Aetna says genetic testing, which can run from \$400 to more than \$2,000 a test, can result in earlier and more effective treatment .

"A small investment in testing today can prevent or mitigate human suffering while saving on health care costs in the future," said Rowe in a speech at a University of Rochester symposium on genetic privacy.

Though Aetna, CIGNA, Health Net and other insurers already cover genetic tests and counseling under certain circumstances, some consumers are reluctant to get tested because they fear bias in insurance and employment.

Rowe encourages coverage for testing of relatives who don't belong to the health plan if the results would help evaluate members' risk and affect their treatment.

Aetna says genetic testing represented less than .1 percent of its medical spending last year. The company covers about 40 genetic tests, including those for Huntington's disease, breast cancer, Tay-Sachs disease and cystic fibrosis.

Some states, including Connecticut, have laws restricting health insurers' use of genetic tests.