

N.H. large employers unite to seek plan options from health insurers

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CONCORD, N.H. — In an unprecedented move, private and public sector employers in New Hampshire have joined together to ask the insurance industry to develop a new product.

More than 50 employers participating in the New Hampshire Healthcare Purchaser Partnership (NHHPP), including some of the state's largest employers, have jointly issued a Request for Proposal to New Hampshire's insurers calling for the creation of a "tiered network" product in which doctors and hospitals would be ranked based on objective quality and cost/efficiency measures.

Under the proposal, services from providers who perform comparatively better on the specified measures will be available at lower copayments than those from providers who perform worse.

In addition, consumers would have access to comparative quality information on the Internet.

Several large organizations are among those endorsing the initiative, including: General Electric, Hannaford Brothers, HealthTrust, New Hampshire Ball Bearings and Verizon.

"Something has to be done," said Donna Marcin, Human Resources Manager at New Hampshire Ball Bearings and a NHHPP Steering Committee member.

"Employers can't in good conscience sit and watch their premiums climb 10-20% year after year."

Cost and quality measures identified in the RFP were reviewed by NHHPP workgroups with employer, broker, hospital, insurer and physician representation.

According to Peter Hayes, Health Benefit Strategist for Hannaford Brothers and co-chair of the NHHPP's Quality Measures Workgroup, the measures cited have all been developed and tested in other parts of the country.

"We believe that when consumers are provided with quality information they will make better choices," said Hayes. "Over time, this should result in higher quality care being delivered more efficiently which can help consumers make informed medical decisions while promoting quality improvement."

John Andrews, Executive Director of the New Hampshire Municipal Association, and another NHHPP Steering Committee member, is hopeful of the RFP results.

"This isn't about assigning blame but collaborating to make New Hampshire's healthcare market operate more effectively," said Andrews. □