



Michigan Association of Health Plans

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Contact: Richard Murdock
(517) 371-3181

Put Michigan People First coalition receives 2008 Presidential Merit Award from Michigan Association of Health Plans for outstanding dedication to state health care issues

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LANSING, MI — The Put Michigan People First coalition has been selected to receive the Michigan Association of Health Plans (MAHP) 2008 Presidential Merit Award for its work as an advocate for the ill, the elderly, people with disabilities, and those who do not have access to employer-sponsored health insurance or other means of coverage.

The coalition — which formed in 2008 in opposition to state legislation developed by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan that would impose major controversial reforms to the individual health care purchaser market — impressed state legislators with its commitment to public policy that ensures adequate healthcare is accessible and affordable, protects consumers and improves access to coverage for the uninsured.

The discretionary honor is chosen annually by the MAHP board president to recognize an individual or group who has made a positive impact on promoting consumer advocacy as well as accessibility and affordability to health care coverage in Michigan.

“The Put Michigan People First coalition has consistently and effectively served as an advocate for a compromise on individual market health insurance reforms under which all interested parties would benefit,” said MAHP President David Crosby, who is also the President and CEO of Health Plus of Michigan. “We believe the best public policy will result from the information and data the coalition provided that will enable the Legislature to make an informed decision.”

The MAHP is an industry voice for 17 health care plans, covering over 2.1 million Michigan residents, and 45 businesses affiliated with the health care industry. MAHP facilitates communication among members, government, and the industry regarding health care issues of common concern.

Mary Ablan, executive director of the Area Agencies on Aging Associations in Michigan, accepted the award on behalf of the coalition at the MAHP’s 23rd annual conference at Crystal Mountain Resort in Thompsonville. State Sen. Bruce Patterson (R-Canton) and Rep. Alma Wheeler Smith (D-Salem) also were named *Legislators of the Year* by MAHP for outstanding contributions to health care issues.

“We appreciate the partnership our diverse organizations have formed to help ensure the Legislature proceeds with careful deliberation on these bills, as the issues are extremely complex and have far reaching implications for the health and welfare of millions of Michigan citizens,” Ablan said.

In addition to MAHP and the Area Agencies on Aging Association, the coalition partners include AARP, Consumers Union, The Michigan Association of Retarded Citizens, Michigan Coalition of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People, Alzheimer’s Association of Michigan, Michigan Disability Rights Coalition, Elder Law and Disability Rights Section of the State Bar of Michigan, Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America, Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (PHI), and the Michigan Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, among others.

House Speaker Andy Dillon and Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop are considering appointments to a House-Senate conference committee that will determine the outcome of House Bills 5282-5285. One of the key points of opposition to the bills for the Put Michigan People First coalition is the move to create a “high-risk” pool that would impose a tax on all health insurers in Michigan to subsidize losses in the individual purchaser market.

“The high-risk pool proposal designed by Blue Cross will mean higher prices and less protection for those in our state who can least afford to pay more for health insurance,” Ablan said.

“Michigan’s individual insurance market already has the fourth-lowest average prices in the nation and second-lowest among all the Great Lakes states,” she said. “Nobody has demonstrated the need for this legislation. The Blues are simply pushing a ‘solution’ in search of a problem that doesn’t exist in Michigan but would benefit their bank accounts.”

Thirty-four states offer some form of a high-risk pool, according to the National Association of State Comprehensive Health Insurance Plans. Such insurance pools are intended for individuals who are unable to obtain coverage through private insurers and usually offer coverage at a higher cost than private plans. But the high-risk pool proposal in HB 5282-5285 is one of the flaws in the Blues’ package that experts say would cause premiums for Michigan’s sick and elderly to soar as much as 250 percent, noted Ablan.

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