

State of Rhode Island Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner
Health Insurance Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
September 19, 2017, 4:30 P.M. to 6:00 P.M.
State of Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training
1511 Pontiac Avenue, Building 73-1
Cranston, RI 02920-4407

Attendance

Members

Co-Chair Commissioner Marie Ganim, Al Charbonneau, Vivian Weisman, Karl Brother, Ruth Feder, David Katseff, Lisa Tomasso, Sam Salganik

Issuers

Liz McClaine, Neighborhood Health Plan of RI
Lauren Conway, United Healthcare
Gail Carvelli, Blue Cross Blue Shield of RI
Megan Dennen, Blue Cross Blue Shield of RI

State of Rhode Island Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner Staff

Cory King, Libby Bunzli, Maria Casale, Victor Wood

Not in Attendance

Co-Chair Stephen Boyle, Gregory Allen, Hub Brennan, Bill Schmiedeknect, David Feeney, Howard Dulude, Tammy Lederer

Minutes

1. Welcome and Review of June Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Ganim called the meeting to order and welcomed all Health Insurance Advisory Council (HIAC) members and others in attendance.

The minutes from the June 27, 2017 HIAC meeting were accepted unanimously with no changes.

2. Commissioner Ganim & HIAC Introduction and Discussion

Following introductions, Commissioner Ganim offered her perspective on HIAC, stating that she would like to bring issues forward for discussion and, in some cases, approval by the Council. She gave the example of the Affordability Standards, saying she would like to share information on the ramifications

of altering the Affordability Standards and get the Council's support on changes to them. She said that support might take the form of a newspaper letter to the editor or some other public statement.

Karl Brother commented that this approach would be an interesting change but offered "input and feedback and support in terms of promoting things." Al Charbonneau suggested that the HIAC schedule be altered to accommodate the state legislature's schedule, since the General Assembly, when in session, meets at the same time as HIAC and many HIAC members are interested in following and participating in State House activities. The Commissioner and other Council members agreed to this. Al also referred to some healthcare bills that arose in the 2017 legislative session by way of example of items that he would appreciate being discussed more at HIAC meetings.

Ruth Feder commented that there may not be agreement among HIAC members on issues, be they OHIC regulatory actions or state legislation. Other Council members acknowledged this, but the Commissioner and others generally agreed that there wouldn't be many formal votes or official positions taken and that the greatest value in HIAC comes from hearing differing perspectives.

Sam Salganik referred to the other committees and working groups convened by OHIC and suggested HIAC periodically hear updates on their work with the aim of making sure there is a "broad system perspective" and that different group efforts be moving in the same direction.

Lisa Tomasso suggested that more effort be made to connect disparate health policy efforts and also to hear from consumers more often, pointing out that issues related to pending legislation were raised by consumers and business owners at the May meeting in Pawtucket, but that there was little HIAC could do at that point since it was so late in the legislative session. She would like to make more attempts to uncover these policy issues earlier, discuss them as a Council, and see if HIAC can work to support policy change to benefit consumers.

3. RIREACH Consumer Report

Sam Salganik from RIPIN updated the Council on RIREACH consumer assistance activities. He gave a brief overview of the health insurance consumer assistance services RIREACH provides. Sam reported RIREACH opened 195 new cases in August. Sam also shared examples of benefit determination letters sent to consumers. These letters had all personal information redacted, but Sam explained that the letters contradicted the binding coverage documents, leading to much consumer confusion. He wanted to raise awareness of these contradictions with HIAC as it is an ongoing consumer issue.

A brief discussion ensued, regarding the challenges consumers and issuers face in communicating complex benefits in a timely, accurate, and understandable manner. Commissioner Ganim pointed out that regulations around consumer appeals would fall under OHIC's jurisdiction beginning January 1.

4. Affordability Standards – Next Steps

Cory King informed the council that the two workgroups convened under the Affordability Standards – the Alternative Payment Methodology and Care Transformation Advisory Committees – would begin meeting again this fall, beginning with a joint meeting of both committees on October 6. Each

committee will then meet for 3 sessions to develop and share recommendations for advancing work under the Affordability Standards.

Cory also reported that OHIC is working on a comprehensive evaluation of the Affordability Standards, which will include both “qualitative and quantitative components.” The evaluation, prepared with support from Bailit Health Purchasing and other researchers, will assess the impact of provisions of the Affordability Standards and compare data from Rhode Island with other states. Cory estimated the evaluation would be completed by early 2018, and he sought feedback from Council members as to what they would like to see in the evaluation.

Al Charbonneau asked if there was an “argument surfacing for getting rid of the Affordability Standards,” referring to changes that were made in 2015 which weakened the Standards’ hospital rate cap. The Commissioner replied that she was not aware of any effort to remove the Standards or sensing any pressure to do so, adding that HIAC would be “the first group we are going to reach out to if that changes.”

5. OHIC Annual Report

Mark Gray from RIPIN presented an outline of an annual report for OHIC and the HIAC. The report would feature summaries of OHIC’s activity for the previous year, including policy and regulatory outcomes, as well as consumer assistance data and stories from RIREACH. Mark sought feedback from the Council.

Ruth Feder requested the report feature more information about RIREACH, saying many people don’t know RIREACH is available. Karl Brother asked for more information in the report about OHIC and HIAC’s outreach and community engagement activities. Lisa Tomasso suggested that the themes of the report more clearly be tied back to OHIC’s 4 main legislative charges. Sam Salganik said the report should not only be retrospective but also look to initiatives in the coming year. He also suggested adding testimonials from primary care practices and others in addition to consumers.

6. 2017 Form and Rate Review Outcomes

Cory King addressed the Council on the rate decisions issued by OHIC in August, at the conclusion of the 2017 Form and Rate Review process. He directed the Council to the press release issued by OHIC and rate charts showing the filed and approved rates as well as certain rate components.

2017 rates were higher than the previous few years. Cory cited increases in pharmacy costs and outpatient utilization as significant cost drivers. He also noted the reinstatement of a federal health insurance tax that added 1-2% to premiums across most markets.

Lisa Tomasso and Sam Salganik both asked about alternative payment methodologies and what impacts they may have on rates. Lisa encouraged OHIC to study alternative payment methods closely and determine how effective methods are in terms of yielding savings. Both Lisa and Sam said that any savings determined to be creditable to alternative payment methods or other provisions of the Affordability Standards should be indicated in some way on future rate releases.

David Katseff asked about the health insurance tax, noting that it had been suspended the previous year, whether or not if it were suspended for 2018 if OHIC would be able to adjust these recently approved rates. Commissioner Ganim said it may be possible to revise the 2018 rates, but that the process of re-opening rate review was costly, and so any savings realized by the suspension of the tax would have to be enough to justify the expense.

David went on to request that HIAC take a position in favor of suspending the federal health insurance tax for 2018. The Commissioner suggested a letter asking Rhode Island's congressional delegation to support suspension of the tax be drafted and circulated to Council members.

7. October Meeting: Quarterly Public Session in Newport County

Mark Gray informed the Council that the October meeting would be another Quarterly Public Meeting held in a different location and with an extended public comment period. He said OHIC was still working on securing a venue but that it would take place in Newport County, likely in Middletown.

Commissioner Ganim asked if there was anything HIAC would like to do differently at this next quarterly meeting, and Karl Brother suggested OHIC solicit written comment from the public ahead of time.

8. Public Comment

No members of the public offered comments.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Health Insurance Advisory Council will be Tuesday, October 17, 2017 from 4:30 P.M. to 6:00 P.M. at the Town of Portsmouth Town Hall, 2200 East Main Road, Portsmouth RI 02871.