

- SUBJECT:** Promoting awareness and education about health-care coverage
- COMMITTEE:** Insurance — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Smithee, Martinez Fischer, Deshotel, Eiland, Hancock, Isett, Taylor, Thompson
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — Hunter
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 9 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Jennifer Ahrens, Texas Association of Life and Health Insurers; Michelle Apodaca, Texas Hospital Association; Marisa Finley, Scott & White Center for Healthcare Policy; Amanda Fredriksen, AARP; Harry Holmes, Harris County Healthcare Alliance; Patricia Kolodzey, Texas Medical Association; Stacey Pogue, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Gyl Wadge, Mental Health America of Texas; Chris Yanas, Teaching Hospitals of Texas)
- Against — None
- On — Douglas Danzeiser, Texas Department of Insurance
- BACKGROUND:** Under Insurance Code, ch. 524, the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) is required to develop and implement a health coverage public awareness and education program. The program must:
- increase public awareness of health coverage options available in Texas;
 - educate the public on the value of health coverage; and
 - provide information on health coverage options, including health savings accounts and compatible high deductible health benefit plans.

TDI develops and makes public service announcements to educate consumers about health coverage. TDI also runs a webpage and conducts public education.

Under ch. 524, the insurance commissioner must set up a task force regarding health coverage public awareness and an education program.

TDI seeks to obtain funding for health coverage fairs conducted through gifts and grants obtained from any party, including a health benefit plan issuer or a foundation associated with a health benefit plan issuer. Before adopting rules governing this funding, TDI must submit the proposed rules to the Texas Ethics Commission for review.

DIGEST:

SB 78 would amend Insurance Code, ch. 524, to create subch. A, which would rename the Texas Department of Insurance's Health Coverage Awareness and Education Program the TexLink to Health Coverage Program to inform the public about health coverage.

TexLink to Health Coverage Program generally. SB 78 would add several duties for the TexLink Program, which would:

- educate the public about the importance and value of health coverage;
- promote personal responsibility for health care through the purchase of health coverage;
- assist small employers, individuals, and others seeking to purchase health coverage with technical information necessary to understand available health coverage products;
- promote and facilitate the development and availability of new health coverage options;
- increase public awareness of health coverage options available in Texas;
- provide information on health coverage options, including health savings accounts and compatible high deductible health benefit plans; and
- include a public awareness and education component.

Educational programs. SB 78 would require the TexLink Program to engage in educational outreach programs to the public. This would involve creating and distributing informational materials, creating a website and a

toll-free hotline, and other programs that would educate the public about health coverage.

Information about specific health benefit plan issuers. TDI could include information about specific health benefit plan issuers. It would not be allowed to favor or endorse one particular issuer over another in materials produced for the TexLink Program.

Promotional materials. The TexLink Program would have to develop materials that would promote health coverage and distribute information through websites, printed materials, and newsletters. Printed materials would have to be made available to small employers, individuals, and others who sought to purchase health coverage.

Toll-free hotline. TDI could operate a toll-free telephone hotline to respond to inquiries and provide information and technical assistance concerning health coverage products.

The Health and Human Services Commission, through its 2-1-1 telephone number for access to human services, could disseminate information regarding health coverage products provided to the HHSC by TDI and could refer inquiries regarding health coverage products to the toll-free telephone hotline.

Education for high-school students. TDI could develop educational materials and a curriculum to be used in high school classes for educating students about the importance and value of health coverage, comparing health benefit plans, and understanding basic provisions contained in health benefit plans.

Health coverage fairs. TDI could conduct health coverage fairs to provide small employers, individuals, and others seeking to purchase health coverage the opportunity to obtain information about health coverage from division employees and from health benefit plan issuers and agents that elected to participate.

Community events. TDI could participate in events held in Texas to promote awareness of the importance and value of health coverage and to educate small employers, individuals, and others seeking to purchase health coverage. It also could provide support and assistance to

individuals and organizations seeking to develop community-based health coverage plans for uninsured individuals.

Health coverage provided through colleges and universities. TDI could cooperate with a public or private college or university to promote enrollment in health coverage programs sponsored by or obtained through the college or university.

Task Force. SB 78 would allow the insurance commissioner to create a task force that would provide the division administering the Texlink program with information regarding content for educational materials and outreach. The commissioner would be allowed to establish the task force and would appoint its members. SB 78 would require the addition of one or more representatives of a regional or local health-care program for employees of small employers.

Federal-tax “tool kit” for certain businesses. SB 78 would allow TDI to produce materials that would:

- provide step-by-step instructions for a small employer or a single-employee business that had obtained health coverage for the benefit of the employer or business and the employees of the business; and
- be designed to allow the employer or business to obtain the coverage in a manner that qualified for favorable treatment under federal tax laws.

Assistance for small employers and single-employee businesses. TDI could train staff concerning available health-care coverage options for small employers and single-employee businesses to respond to telephone inquiries from small employers and single-employee businesses, and to speak at events to provide information about health-coverage options for small employers and single-employee businesses and about the importance and value of health coverage.

The bill would take effect on September 1, 2009.