

Resist temptation to cut funds for health care

On Sept. 30, Gov. Paterson announced a major investment of \$100 million in one-time grants to strengthen and expand New York state's primary care infrastructure through its HEAL 6 program. This investment is an essential step in assuring that every New Yorker has access to cost-effective primary and preventive care.

In the northern region, the state gave more than \$7.7 million, including nearly \$500,000 to Schenectady Family Health Services, to strengthen women's health services in Schenectady.

The Heal 6 investment makes more urgent than ever a four-year commitment made last year by the governor and Legislature to reform primary care reimbursement and address the provider shortage across New York communities. This commitment will come under enormous pressure as the state copes with budget shortfalls in the years to come.

Yet never has continued investment in primary and preventive care been more urgent or timely. The availability of such care is the only strategy that will allow the state to control the burgeoning cost of health care (driven by avoidable chronic illness and reliance on emergency room and hospital use), meet the health care needs of newly unemployed and uninsured New Yorkers, and still improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities.

In the year ahead, the governor and Legislature must keep the commitment. The question we should be asking is not "can we afford not to make this investment?" but rather, "can we afford not to?"

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