

October 30, 2007

## Albany urged to raise health care spending

By Jay Gallagher  
*Albany Bureau Chief*

ALBANY -- The state should spend an additional \$550 million to build up routine and preventive medical care, which is lacking in many parts of the state, lawmakers were told at a hearing Monday.

Raymond Sweeney, vice president of the state Healthcare Association, said the extra cash needs to be spent to raise Medicaid payments to clinics and doctors who supply primary care, which is seen as key to improving public health and in the long run reducing the cost of health care.

"If you're serious about improving primary care, you've got to do something about reimbursements," he said at the hearing.

The state health commissioner made a pitch that lawmakers support improved primary care, but said there is no need to increase overall state spending on health care.

Health Commissioner Dr. Richard Daines said spending on health care amounts to \$6,535 per person in New York, \$1,300 above the national average and higher than any state except Massachusetts and Maine.

The fix?

"Primary care must be the foundation of a reformed health-care system," he said.

Primary-care physicians are internists, pediatricians and others who deliver overall care, as opposed to specialists.