

Coalition calls for more preventative health care

By CHRIS MARTINSON
Legislative Gazette Staff Writer
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Statewide health leaders called for increased primary and preventive treatment in New York's health system last week, which they said could save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.

The leaders, including Assembly health committee Chairman Richard N. Gottfried, D,WF-Manhattan, are urging the governor's Commission on Healthcare Facilities in the 21st Century to take into account primary and preventive treatment when deciding the future of medicine in New York State.

The primary health practice is a patient's first level of contact, where they are treated at their homes or community health centers. The primary strategy is meant to keep people healthy and out of more intensive settings like emergency rooms.

The leaders, forming the Primary Care Coalition, released a report last Wednesday that concluded hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars could be saved if a greater emphasis were placed on preventive and primary treatment for medically underserved New Yorkers.

"The report confirms that bolstering primary care in New York will result in three distinct positive outcomes: lower costs, better health outcomes and reduced health disparities among the state's residents," according to a statement from the coalition.

The coalition was joined by leaders from the Legislature and labor, business and health organization officials to send a message to the governor's commission and other state lawmakers stating: "Without a deliberate focus on primary and preventive care, the health care system in New York cannot be improved, let alone fixed."

The coalition said the governor's commission is looking at the long term, but not at short-term primary and preventive medicine, which is the "frontline" of the health system, and provides both quality and affordability for communities and patients.

Gottfried commended an "extraordinarily fine" component of the primary health system — community health centers — which are of high quality and affordability, he said. Benefits of these centers include sliding scale fees based on a patient's income.

"This is a magnificent piece of good news in our health care system" Gottfried said. It is a "real opportunity to move forward with support for community health care systems."

Assembly energy committee Chairman Paul Tonko, D-Amsterdam, pointed to what he sees as a great disparity in New York — the largest gap in the nation between rich and poor. Studies have shown primary treatment eliminates those disparities and narrows that gap.

"The quality health care equation is incomplete without primary health care," he said.

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