

Price Check on Aisle Health Care: ***A Proposal to Improve Out-of-Pocket Health Care Cost Transparency***

Health care costs are incredibly complicated and difficult to navigate. In today's system, there is no one price for health care -- what consumers pay varies dramatically by provider, facility, and insurance coverage. As a result, Americans rarely know how much they will need to pay out-of-pocket before receiving care. Without accessible price estimates, it is impossible for consumers to compare providers and anticipate what they will have to pay.

The following proposal would help consumers figure out what the price of their health care will be. Regardless of whether they have a private plan or Medicare, consumers will be able to approximate their personalized out-of-pocket costs before going to the provider's office.

This proposal:

- Enables consumers to get estimates of the price of a service, the insurance plan coverage, and how much their out-of-pocket payments would be for any in-network medical service or procedure based on their plan and the providers or facilities they choose.
- Requires private insurers, Medicare, and Medicare Advantage to provide access to health care cost information to enrollees and beneficiaries through online search tools and a toll free telephone line.
- For out-of-network providers, requires insurers to provide general information on the out-of-network cost-sharing provisions of the individual's coverage, as well as link to a reliable external source for average out-of-network costs in the area.
- Requires providers to adopt electronic health tools that provide patient-specific out-of-pocket cost information for prescription drugs at the point of prescribing.

Providing information that is individualized and reflects specific insurer, benefit plan, and provider information is essential to achieving meaningful transparency. It may not be possible to plan ahead for the cost of urgent or emergency services. However, patients can benefit from knowing their out-of-pocket cost for scheduled appointments and procedures as well as prescription drugs. This is especially true as growing numbers of Americans face high-deductibles or increasing cost-sharing.

In addition to meaningful price information, consumers need access to information on the quality of providers. There is often a misconception that higher-cost care is also higher-quality, but that's often not the case. Providing easily understandable quality information alongside cost enables consumers to choose higher-value care. Unexpected or uncertain out-of-pocket health care costs are a major concern for Americans as health care spending goes up faster than their paychecks. Providing transparent health care cost information can empower consumers to better understand their cost-sharing obligations before receiving a bill or arriving at the pharmacy counter.