

The Health Care Price Check Act

Senator Ron Wyden

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 end up paying 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 Health Care Price Check Act 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 or pharmacy.

The bill:

- Enables consumers to get price estimates, find out what their insurance plan will cover, and determine how much their out-of-pocket payments would be for any in-network medical service or procedure and prescription drugs based on their plan and the providers, facilities, or pharmacies they choose.
- Requires private insurers, Medicare, Medicare Advantage, and Medicare Part D Plans to provide access to health care out-of-pocket cost and quality information to enrollees and beneficiaries through online search tools and a toll free telephone line.

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 and 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. Providing quality information alongside cost can enable consumers to choose higher value care and prepare financially for non-emergency situations.

Uncertain out-of-pocket health care costs are a major concern for Americans as health care spending goes up faster than their paychecks. This bill is one step towards providing transparent health care cost information to help consumers to better understand their cost-sharing obligations before showing up at the doctor's office or arriving at the pharmacy counter.