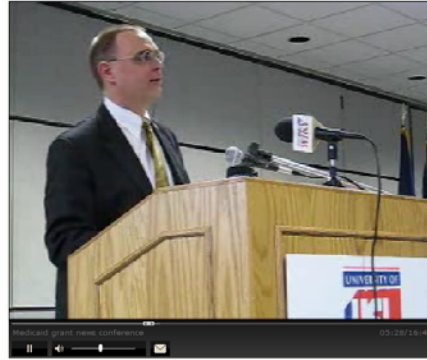


Medicaid grant news conference



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Health grant lauded, Evansville linked to statewide info | VIDEO

By Gavin Lesnick (Contact)
Tuesday, January 29, 2008



A \$1.3 million federal grant will align Evansville with a growing number of statewide communities that share patient information among health care providers through a secure, Web-based application.

The Medicaid transformation grant, which was announced Monday at a news conference featuring prominent local and state health care leaders, ultimately will provide better quality and safety of care while also saving costs to Medicaid patients, people with private insurance and those without any insurance, officials said.

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The grant will be used over two years to link Evansville's health care providers with the growing statewide health information exchange, an electronic portal that can deliver lab results, reports, medication histories, treatment histories and more in a standard, electronic format.

Representatives from the Indiana Health Information Exchange worked with the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration to determine the money would go to Evansville, which was selected in part because of its significant population of Medicaid patients, private pay patients and area providers.

The program's potential benefits are enormous, said Dr. J. Marc Overhage, CEO of the state health exchange.

"If this afternoon I ended up having to go the emergency department at one of your fine hospitals here, the physician would have to rely on what I could tell them about my health care and what had happened," he said. "As we make progress with this project, they wouldn't have to ask all of those questions. They would have access to information ... critical to delivering high-quality, safe and efficient care."

That standardization and increased speed and accessibility should improve quality and safety of care while also eliminating unnecessary costs, said Dr. Jeff Wells, Indiana Medicaid Director.

Representatives from local health care facilities — St. Mary's Medical Center, Deaconess Hospital and the Welborn Clinic — also praised the funding as a step toward better care locally and statewide.

Dr. Donald Lurye, Welborn Clinic's chief medical officer, said the exchange will help facilities place increased emphasis on the flow of information, an area which he said needs attention.

"We create (information), we transmit it, we use it, but we don't have the access to it that we need," he said, comparing the information exchange in medicine to the more complex focus it receives from banks, travel and retail establishments.

The Vanderburgh County Health Department — and, by extension, the residents here — also stand to benefit, said Gary Heck, its chief operating officer.

"We'll be able to go out and start following up on disease cases before we would have known we even had them to begin with," when the exchange is functional here, he said. "That's going to make everybody just that much healthier."

The network Evansville will join consists of 33 hospitals, 7,200 physicians and 2,445 practices statewide.

The program here is unique, though, because it is among the first to specifically align the exchange effort with Medicaid goals. It could even contribute to defining state and national policies on health care exchanges down the road, Overhage said.