HEALTH ISSUES
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Bipartisan Health Care Bill Introduced in Senate

A bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate yesterday by Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA) of the Health Education Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. The bill would seek to stabilize premiums in the individual market. It is currently cosponsored by 12 Republicans and 12 Democrats.

Under the proposed legislation, federal reimbursements to insurers for cost-sharing reductions (CSRs) would be provided through 2019. State insurance regulators would be required to certify that CSR payments received by health care plans in 2018 are passed on to enrollees or the federal government. In addition, the bill would eliminate age and economic hardship requirements for catastrophic coverage “copper” plans, and direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to issue regulations for interstate sales of health care plans.

The bill would also make several changes to the Affordable Care Act’s (ACA’s) State 1332 Innovation Waivers. It revises the waiver language to require states to provide plans of “comparable affordability” to low-income and high-risk individuals—rather than plans of equal affordability, as originally provided by the ACA. In addition, the bill provides states with funding flexibility to establish reinsurance plans, high risk pools, insurance stability funds, and other programs. It would also provide an expedited approval process for state waivers, and require the Secretary of HHS to provide guidance on examples of state health plans that meet approval requirements.

The Academy’s Health Practice Council (HPC) sent a letter in September to the Senate’s HELP Committee about what’s required to stabilize the individual health insurance market during a series of bipartisan hearings. The HPC also released a policy paper on the importance of funding for CSRs, and a list of frequently asked questions on risk pooling in the individual market in July.

If you have any questions regarding this Academy Alert, please contact David Linn, senior health policy analyst (linn@actuary.org; 202-785-6931).

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