



PAR urges commission to help with transition

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A special commission should be created to help the state cope with the federally mandated health-care revamp, the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana recommended Tuesday.

The commission is needed “to create an open process that helps avoid misunderstanding and disagreement,” the governmental research group said in its latest issue commentary.

“The passage of national health care reform legislation in March has triggered a major state-level planning effort as Louisiana officials prepare to boost Medicaid enrollment according to the federally mandated timeline and parameters,” PAR said.

“Initial estimates show that the state’s Medicaid program could extend coverage to an additional 385,000 people at a total cost of \$4.2 billion and a state cost of \$419 million for fiscal year 2023.”

So far, Louisiana officials have been engaged in “a closed-door, in-house planning process,” PAR said.

The group said the public would be better served with an open planning and decision-making process.

Gov. Bobby Jindal should issue an executive order creating a commission or the Legislature should create one through adoption of a resolution, according to PAR.

Among the issues that need to be addressed are:

- Nailing down of costs associated with expanding the Medicaid health insurance program for the poor to cover everyone with income below 133 percent of the poverty level.
- The impact of the health-care revamp on the state’s charity hospital system as more people become insured.
- Insuring that insurance exchanges are properly implemented to provide accurate and understandable information on costs and benefits of each plan.

PAR suggested that the commission include state agency heads, legislative leaders and representatives of key health-care provider and advocacy groups affected by the federal changes.

Issue-oriented work groups could be used to expand board expertise.

“The past year has demonstrated that the entire nation has an overwhelming interest in health care and how it will be changed,” PAR said. “The best way to set the record straight for a worried citizenry is to provide access to facts and ample opportunity for public input.”