



## Courtney Elder Law Associates

*Elder Law • Special Needs Planning • Estate Planning*

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### **2012 Progress Report: Mississippi Implementing Health Reform**

In the nearly two years since President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law, all States have taken some action to implement health reform. For example, forty-four states are participating in the new premium rate review system where insurers must justify the rationale for any double-digit insurance premium increase. And 28 States and the District of Columbia are on their way toward establishing their own Affordable Insurance Exchange - an essential component of the law.

Affordable Insurance Exchanges are one-stop marketplaces where consumers can choose a private health insurance plan that fits their health needs. Starting in 2014, they will offer to the public the same kinds of insurance choices members of Congress will have. Exchanges will select private health insurance plans qualified to offer coverage; facilitate consumer assistance, shopping and enrollment; and coordinate eligibility for the Exchange and potential premium assistance.

The Affordable Care Act gives States the resources and power to build and run their own Exchange. It offers States access to funding through Exchange "planning," "establishment," and "Early Innovator" grant programs. On September 30, 2010, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awarded \$49 million to 48 States and the District of Columbia to conduct planning activities (Minnesota was awarded a planning grant later). On February 16, 2011, HHS awarded Early Innovator grants to six States and one multi-State consortium to get a head start developing the information technology (IT) needed for Exchanges. And HHS is, on a quarterly basis, awarding establishment grants to support the building of Exchanges. Three rounds of establishment grants have been awarded, with 28 States and the District of Columbia having received establishment grants as of November 29, 2011. Additional States have applied for establishment grants in December, with awards to be made in mid-February.

A recent report summarizes the actions taken by States to establish Exchanges and focuses on examples of the legislation and executive actions, public meetings, and other activities undertaken by States across the country to create these new health insurance marketplaces. It profiles ten States that cut across the spectrum of geography, demographics, and political leadership. The States profiled are not necessarily the States most advanced in establishing an Exchange; instead, they illustrate the diversity of approaches and progress being made. Mississippi is one of the states profiled, and the summary follows.

**Mississippi:** The State created a Mississippi Health Insurance Exchange Study Commission in 2010, and used its \$1 million planning grant to fund research and outreach. On April 26, 2011, then-Governor Haley Barbour (R) signed a law that allowed the Study Commission to continue its work through 2011. Mississippi held over a dozen town hall meetings to receive input on the

design of the Exchange in the summer of 20 11. It received a \$20.1 million Exchange establishment grant on August 12, 2011. In total, Mississippi has received \$21.1 million to develop its Exchange.

After legislation authorizing an Exchange failed to pass, the State determined in October 2011 that the previously authorized non-profit high-risk pool association could broaden its mission to run the State's Exchange. The high-risk pool association is finalizing a contract to build the 'shop and compare' piece of the Mississippi Exchange by March. Once built, Mississippi will use it to visually demonstrate what the Exchange will do for its citizens while simultaneously building the functional pieces it will 'plug into' its Exchange.

### **What They Are Saying in Mississippi:**

"A healthcare exchange is not a partisan political issue. Across this nation, Republicans and Democrats alike have embraced the concept of health exchanges as a way to help individuals and small businesses more easily obtain health insurance."

- Mississippi Commissioner of Insurance Mike Chaney (R), April 17, 2011

**For information about Pre-existing Condition Insurance Plans or other aspects of the Affordable Care Act that may help you with health-care costs, contact us at Courtney Elder Law Associates today.**