

STATE AUDITOR DOUG HOFFER

PRESS RELEASE

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State Auditor Examines Consumer Access to Health Care Information

MONTPELIER – Vermont State Auditor Doug Hoffer today released the findings of an investigation into a powerful state database that sheds light on prices, trends, and variation across Vermont’s health care system. The Vermont Health Care Uniform Reporting and Evaluation System (VHCURES) is a digital catalogue of all fees for medical services and products that insurers paid over the last seven years for Vermont residents.

The Auditor’s inquiry found that while the State has made great progress in developing this resource, State entities have yet to fulfill the statutory duty of using the database to better inform consumers about health care.

In July 2013, the Green Mountain Care Board became responsible for the statutory charges in 18 V.S.A. §9410 of maintaining the database and creating a “consumer health care price and quality information system designed to make available to consumers transparent health care price information, quality information, and such other information ... to empower individuals.” The release of the Auditor’s report comes as the Board is soliciting bids from contractors to overhaul the database.

“The Legislature determined that Vermonters have a right to know the cost of medical services and what quality of care different providers deliver,” Auditor Hoffer said. “The state has done little to help Vermonters understand their health care options, and the evolution of VHCURES is a golden opportunity to bring Vermont patients further into the decision-making process for their health care needs.”

The development of VHCURES parallels a trend in Vermont of patients becoming increasingly responsible for paying a larger share of costs for health care services and products, as enrollment in high-deductible health plans rose from 21 percent of the state’s commercial market in 2009 to 34 percent in 2012.

“The shifting health insurance landscape encourages Vermonters to make decisions based on the cost of care, but our health care system is not giving Vermonters the necessary information to weigh their options,” Auditor Hoffer said. “The time is ripe for the State to begin to help Vermonters better understand their health care options and fulfill the duties established by the Legislature. We are encouraged that the Board has acknowledged the unmet need and the opportunity to move forward with this important initiative.”

The report, called “VHCURES: Past, Present, and Future – Opportunities for Health Care Price Transparency and Greater Consumer Information,” is broken into three main sections based on the inquiry’s chief objectives, which were to:

1. Determine how the claims database was used in the past and is used at present;
2. Identify what plans are in place for a new version of the database; and
3. Assess the extent to which the database could be used to provide greater transparency of health care costs and to better inform consumers of the price of specific medical procedures

To read the report, click [here](#).