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Survey looks to other states for health care reform

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CHARLESTON - West Virginia might be able to provide better health care if government leadership valued health as it relates to the work force and if health collaborations in the state were more successful.



Those suggestions were given to a health subcommittee of the West Virginia Legislature Sunday afternoon during January interim meetings. Paul Miller, outreach director for the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, provided the overview to lawmakers.

Miller cited a study performed last year by the Commonwealth Fund that ranked West Virginia 35th in the nation across indicators such as access, prevention and treatment. Vermont was ranked No. 1, and Miller said his organization is trying to learn best practices from the top states.

"We wanted to take that framework and see if it was applicable to West Virginia," Miller said. His organization conducted a survey of 33 opinion leaders from the Legislature, hospitals and medical schools, among other fields, but health care consumers were not polled.

Miller said the West Virginia Perinatal Partnership was an example of a successful collaboration in the state, but the attempts at health care reform in the 1990s was an example of a poor one.

Miller said his survey respondents said West Virginia does a poor job of providing transparent health information, and while the state compiles a lot of health data, it's rarely pulled together, so it has little value.

He said child care health and prevention is where the state could see the biggest bang for its health care buck.

"If West Virginia's hospital re-admissions improved, we would see a \$41 million savings in Medicare," he said.

Miller said West Virginia is the first state he knows of trying to use the study to improve its health care climate. He said Vermont has a culture of a continuing process of improvement of health care rather than a culture of resistance to change.

Miller said his organization's full report would be finished by the end of January.

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