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Coverage should be the same for all health issues

It's always been a mystery why insurance policies routinely covered malfunctions of the heart, liver or kidneys but consumers have had to fight for coverage of malfunctions of the most important organ — the brain.

Advocates are holding a series of symposiums, including one in Green Bay today, that call attention to a new federal law that requires parity in care when insurance plans offer coverage for mental health and substance abuse disorders.

Parity means "if you have a mental illness you get the same treatment you can get if you have cancer or anything else," said David Riemer, director of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute. The Institute's event at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College is designed to gather information about how the current system and new law work, and what still needs to be fixed.

A bill introduced by state Sen. Dave Hansen, D-Green Bay, and state Rep. Sandy Pasch, D-Whitefish Bay, would plug one hole — the federal law only applies to group plans with more than 50 employees. The bill would expand that help to state residents who work for smaller employers.

Advocates say these new requirements can be enforced without raising costs to all consumers, but they'd help assure a public nervous about the general topic of health care by explaining how that will work. State lawmakers should be clear about how this legislation might fiscally impact all parties involved before acting.

And while we feel requiring parity in insurance coverage for mental health care is a sound idea, it also would be helpful to know how these measures fit into the larger, still-emerging picture of health-care reform.

Additional Facts

If you go

The symposium "Making Parity Real" takes place from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. today at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, Room 128, Lecture Hall, Student Center, 2740 W. Mason St., Green Bay.\
