

September 14, 2011

<http://detnews.com/article/20110914/LIFESTYLE03/109140398>

Snyder calls for smoke-free beaches, coverage for autism treatments

KAREN BOUFFARD

/ Detroit News Lansing Bureau

Grand Rapids— Gov. Rick Snyder on Wednesday called for smoke-free beaches in Michigan, a state registry of childrens' weight information and insurance coverage for autism treatments in his health and wellness address.

In his comments at the Heart of the City Health Center, he also called for getting more veterans enrolled in health care offered by the Veterans Administration, giving children better access to healthier foods and exercise, and making sure young pregnant women get prenatal care.

Doctors would calculate childrens' body mass index and report it to the Michigan Care Improvement registry, Snyder spokeswoman Sara Wurfel said on Tuesday. The child would remain anonymous. The registry run by the Department of Community Health is the same one used to report childhood immunizations.

Snyder introduced Wednesday a 4-by-4 program asking people to work on BMI, weight, blood pressure and cholesterol. To drive his point home he announced his own statistics: "I'm stepping up today to say I'm doing 4-by-4, and I'm happy to share my BMI, 26.8, and weight, 192 pounds. My blood pressure is 102 over 60."

He added his cholesterol is 183 and 115 for LDL. Blood sugar is 99.

He also announced a summit on teen pregnancy in Ypsilanti on Oct. 17.

"We need to reduce infant mortality; our numbers are not good," he said. "We need to work with these mothers before these babies arrive."

Snyder also said his administration will look in the next budget for increased money for kids' dental programs.

Drew Eason, CEO and executive director of the Michigan Dental Association, applauded the focus on dentistry.

"Michigan's Healthy Kids Dental program is considered a model for the nation, yet it only reaches one-third of Medicaid-eligible children and few in the state's largest urban areas," Eason said. "The MDA has long worked to expand this program. Now's the time to get it done."

On autism, Snyder said: "One out of every 110 kids have autism. There are now ways to have successful treatments for more of our kids and those children can have a close to normal, productive life."

He noted 27 other states now provide insurance coverage for autism therapies.

Autism Speaks, the national advocacy group for those affected by the disorder, applauded Snyder's call for insurance coverage of therapies and reiterated their support for two bills in the Senate that would require

coverage to be offered for children up to the age of 18 and a maximum of \$50,000 a year.

"Without insurance coverage, Michigan families often pay as much as they can out-of-pocket for services that can cost upwards of \$50,000 per year," said Peter Bell, Autism Speaks executive vice president for programs and services. "In the process, many risk their homes and the educations of their unaffected children — essentially mortgaging their entire futures."

The governor also unveiled his plans for the state's health insurance exchange. A bill to create it was introduced in the Senate on Tuesday.

The exchange will be called the Michigan Health Market Place. He said it will be based on four principals: It has to allow for individuals and businesses to go shopping and compare options; shouldn't add bureaucracy or cost to citizens; shouldn't be the only option; and should be focused on customer service.

The federal Affordable Care Act requires each state to form an exchange for insurers to compete to provide low-cost plans to individuals and small businesses.

States must make progress on creating an exchange by Jan. 1, 2013, or the federal government can come in and create the plan for them. The exchanges must be up and running by Jan. 1, 2014.

In conjunction with the exchange, Snyder will ask the Legislature for a major overhaul of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan.

"(We need to) recognize BCBS, they've been a major factor in our state for a number of years, and will have a continuing important role," Snyder said.

Andrew Hetzel, vice president for Corporate Communications for Blue Cross Blue Shield said the company has been in discussions with the administration and Legislature about updating regulations. Changes to what Hetzel called "Michigan's antiquated regulatory system" will mean lower insurance costs for employers and consumers.

kbouffard@detnews.com

(517) 371-3660