

Creating a Vaccine Assessment Account in Alaska: Questions and Answers

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1. How could a vaccine assessment program reduce costs and barriers for providers and patients?

The proposed solution increases access to vaccines while both insurance companies and health care providers would realize savings -- all at no cost to the state. Insurance payers (private and public) are assessed a fee upfront for the purchasing of vaccines. Using collected fees, the state purchases vaccines in bulk at lower prices than what health care providers can do independently. Health care providers would be distributed the vaccine free of charge and reduce their administrative burden with a single inventory. Providers would also bill insurance companies for less, creating savings for insurance companies. Savings are passed on to patients, who would be charged only for the office visit.

2. Would this bill mandate that all children would need to be vaccinated.

No, this bill does not address childhood vaccination mandates.

3. For whom would participation in the assessment be mandatory?

Participation in the assessment would be mandatory for health care insurers, health benefit plans, self-funded church or government plans, and other creditable coverage. To the extent allowed by federal law, Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) plans would be expected to pay under the definition for “health care insurer”. Third party administrators—who are often contracted to perform medical management and claims processing activities for ERISA plan trustees—would also be included in the mandatory assessment.

4. For whom would participation in the assessment be voluntary?

Voluntary participation in the assessment only applies to providers who wish to obtain state-distributed vaccine for adults who are either uninsured or not otherwise covered by an assessed payer. Providers do not have to opt in or pay an assessment to receive state-supplied vaccine. The benefits of opting-in include discounted vaccine pricing, fewer administrative burdens, and provision of a single vaccine inventory. Providers who care for large numbers of non-qualifying participants already purchase vaccine from the marketplace for their clients, and it is expected that they would continue to do so if they decide not to opt-in to the assessment.

5. Would publicly-funded healthcare benefit plans be mandated to participate in the program?

Yes, publicly funded healthcare benefit plans are included in the bill’s definition of “health care insurer”. However, it is currently unclear whether this bill could legally require *federally*-funded healthcare benefit plans (e.g., Medicaid, Medicare, the Veteran’s Administration, Department of Defense, TRICARE, and tribal health) to participate in the assessment, as federal law might prohibit such a mandate for some or all of the plans. For federal plans that would not be required to participate, providers would need to either opt-in to the assessment or directly purchase vaccine for their patients not covered in the assessment by another payer.

6. Would pharmacists (who give shots at retail pharmacies) be able to participate in the program?

Yes, pharmacists with a collaborating physician would be able to receive vaccine for uninsured adults if they pay an assessment. If they don’t opt-in they will continue to directly purchase vaccine for their patients as they do now.

7. Would the Patient Protection Affordable Care Act (PPACA) preempt any provision(s) of the vaccine assessment account?

No. The vaccine assessment account supports the PPACA requirement that coverage be provided without the imposition of cost-sharing for immunizations for routine use in children and adults.

8. Where would the State store the vaccine?

Vaccine would be stored in the Alaska Division of Public Health’s central Vaccine Depot in Anchorage.

9. Does the bill establish whether the assessment will be a covered lives model or dosage-based model?

No, the Vaccination Assessment Commission determines which model will be best for Alaska.

10. How would payer assessment costs be determined?

The department would project the state-supplied vaccine cost and overhead for running the program annually. The Vaccination Assessment Commission would proportionately allocate the fair market share of costs to payers based on the method established in the plan of operation.