



News release

King County Executive
Ron Sims

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King County becomes first local government to promote federal goals for better health information

Best quality, most affordable health choices the goal

King County Executive Ron Sims has issued an Executive Order that will improve health care information in King County and help increase access to better, more affordable healthcare. The order directs county agencies to improve health care quality and reduce costs by improving information to both consumers and providers, and others in the healthcare system. The undertaking is part of a national effort and King County is the first local government in the nation to commit to it.



King County Executive Ron Sims signed the Executive Orders at a press event this morning attended by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt, Governor Christine Gregoire, and key regional business and health care leaders.

Secretary Leavitt has called on employers nationwide to commit to "four cornerstones" to improve health care quality and reduce health costs by providing information in the health care sector. The "four cornerstone" goals for a value-driven health care system call for improving:

1. Health information technology – to make it possible to share patient health information securely and seamlessly among health care providers
2. Transparency of quality measurements - so that health care providers as well as the public can learn how well each provider measures up in delivering care
3. Transparency of pricing information - so that when patients choose routine and elective care, they can make comparisons on the basis of both quality and cost
4. Promoting quality and efficiency of care – by providing incentives to healthcare providers for quality care at competitive prices or providing insurance options that reward consumers for choosing on the basis of quality and cost.

"We must break out of the downward spiral of cost-shifting and benefit cuts that have become common in this era of double-digit annual health care cost increases," Sims said. "Implementing these "four cornerstone" goals will help move us towards the day when we can truly say that quality health care coverage is a basic right of every American."

The goals mirror efforts already underway in King County as part of the King County Health Reform Initiative, and the Puget Sound Health Alliance, a groundbreaking collaborative effort by

public and private regional organizations to improve the quality, efficiency and costs of health care delivery throughout King, Kitsap, Pierce, Thurston and Snohomish counties. Both efforts began under Sims' direction. During the event, Secretary Leavitt recognized the Puget Sound Health Alliance as a Community Leader for Value-driven Health Care, which will support the organization's work towards achieving the "four cornerstone" goals.

Today's Executive Order will help individuals and employers make informed health care choices and enable them to seek out the best quality care at the most affordable price. At the county level, activities include:

1. implementing the Healthy IncentivesSM program, which provides financial incentives to employees and their spouse/domestic partners to complete a personal wellness assessment and enroll in action plans for better health
2. reducing health risks "upstream" by employing strategies based on prevention and early detection of illness, including working with area hospitals and health care providers to develop clinical guidelines and practices in key areas of chronic illness to address problems earlier and more effectively, and
3. evaluating and measuring the effectiveness of all benefit and workplace health strategies.

These activities should help reduce overall health care costs as well.

President Bush has already signed an executive order committing federal health care programs such as Medicare, the Veterans Affairs health system, the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program and certain other federal health care programs to begin delivering on the four goals in the coming year. States, other governments and private employers are also being invited to commit to the four goals. By joining in this national effort, King County will help make these improvements the standard throughout the health care system and is the first local government in the nation to do so.

"We are aligning our work with the federal government's efforts in the hope that there is more opportunity for federal partnerships and investment in our efforts," said Sims. "Ultimately, empowering both the consumers of health care and those who provide it with access to information means better care at lower cost. It will improve the health of our communities, and the quality of our lives from the national through the local level."

More information about the [Puget Sound Health Alliance is available](#).