

Statement by Robert Greenstein, President, On Unifying the District of Columbia's Health Insurance Marketplace

“The DC Health Benefits Exchange Board’s recent decision to move to a unified health insurance market over the next two years will make it easier for small businesses to give their employees quality, affordable health insurance.

“Starting in 2014, under the Affordable Care Act, the District of Columbia will have a new health insurance marketplace called the DC Health Benefits Exchange (HBX) for individuals and small businesses. Today, many small businesses have trouble finding quality, affordable health insurance and, even when they do offer coverage, most can offer only a single plan choice for employees. The Exchange holds the promise of enabling small employers to offer employees a number of plan options, which would increase choice for both employers and their workers.

“Combining the new exchange and existing health insurance markets into a larger, single market would make it far likelier that the DC Exchange achieves this critical goal. For example, it would be able to better ensure meaningful consumer protections and value in the coverage provided, because all individual market and small group plans sold in the District would have to meet the quality standards that the Exchange’s expert board establishes. The unified market would also enable individuals and small businesses to band together into a larger pool, creating the kind of purchasing power that, today, only larger businesses typically enjoy. Most importantly, this unified market would help foster real competition among health insurers, which doesn’t exist in the market today. All health insurance carriers would have to show their plans and premium prices on an easy-to-use website, alongside quality ratings, which would allow consumers and small businesses to make informed apples-to-apples comparisons when choosing the best plan for their families and employees.

“Under the DC Exchange Board’s transition plan, small businesses will retain a number of options when the Exchange launches. They will be able to continue buying coverage in the existing, small group market for another two years, or they could buy coverage through the Exchange and begin receiving the benefits it provides from day one. By the end of 2015, all individuals and small businesses will be under one big pool with access to meaningful choice among quality affordable health plans through the new, enhanced marketplace in the DC Exchange.

“Unifying the health insurance marketplace is the right decision for District residents and small businesses, and will help ensure that the Affordable Care Act’s goal of quality, affordable health insurance for all Americans is realized here in Washington, DC.”

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