

Health care put on hold

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WASHINGTON — President Obama's program extending health care coverage to the uninsured with preexisting conditions launched yesterday — but not in New York.

Officials say the delay is because Gov. Paterson chose to have the state manage the stopgap program instead of the federal Health and Human Services Department.

And New York only submitted the paperwork yesterday for the estimated \$297 million in HHS funding.

"We look forward to working with the federal government to implement this program as quickly and effectively as possible," Paterson said, but he had no guarantees on when the uninsured might be enrolled and covered.

N.Y. among 29 states to delay Bam's plan for uninsured with preexisting conditions

"New York hopes to begin accepting applications by Aug. 15, with coverage available by the late fall," the governor's office said in a statement.

The \$5 billion Pre-existing Condition Insurance Plan, part of Obama's landmark health care bill passed this year, was meant to provide coverage nationwide to about 350,000 people.

It is a coverage bridge until the Affordable Care Act goes into full effect in 2014.

"This program will provide people the help they need as the nation transitions to a more competitive and fair marketplace in

2014," HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said.

Enrollments for those who have been without coverage for at least six months began in 21 states that accepted federal management, but results were mixed in New York and the 28 other states that chose to keep the program under local control.

Several advocacy groups said the delay in New York was justified as state officials wrestled with the feds for a better deal that would not jeopardize reforms already in place.

"New York wants to ensure the new pro-

gram includes our important and hard-fought consumer protections," said state Insurance Superintendent James Wynn.

New York has a "guaranteed issue" program with high premiums for coverage of preexisting conditions.

Advocacy groups said it would have been better to use the federal money to lower premiums under the existing program.

"New York is not alone in this regard," said Richard Cauchi, health program director for the National Conference of State Legislatures.

"This is a case where New York has been doing the right thing, but no good deed goes unpunished," said Susan Dooha, executive director of the Center for the Independence of the Disabled. "Now we have to set up a whole new thing."

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