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## Some Medicaid records now open to public

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Want to find out how much the local nursing home or doctor gets in Medicaid reimbursements?

The state Department of Health and Human Services is now posting that and other health care provider information online so taxpayers can see how their money is spent.

For example, the Medicaid program paid 98 inpatient hospitals more than \$843 million in fiscal 2007, according to the site.

Of that, Greenville Hospital System ó except for Allen Bennett Memorial and North Greenville hospitals ó received \$65 million for 8,273 beneficiaries and 9,865 patient visits, while Bon Secours St. Francis Health System got \$10.6 million for 1,924 patients and 2,098 visits.

The move by DHHS, which administers the Medicaid program, is part of an initiative by Gov. Mark Sanford to improve government transparency. Another site inaugurated this year lets taxpayers see agency administrative expenditures.

"It's an outgrowth of what we're already doing with other state agencies on the state spending transparency site, which is aimed at giving taxpayers a better idea of how their dollars are being spent," Sanford spokesman Joel Sawyer said via email.

All state agencies that report detailed spending transactions under the Statewide Accounting and Reporting System are included, according to the comptroller general's office.

Sawyer said several states have launched spending transparency sites. And DHHS spokesman Jeff Stensland said Florida and Missouri are also posting their Medicaid expenditures.

More than 800,000 South Carolinians receive Medicaid, which covers about half of all births in the state, or 33,314 of the 60,822 births in fiscal 2007, he said.

And in fiscal 2007, with a budget of \$4.7 billion, Medicaid spent \$110 million on agency administration, \$342 million on pharmaceuticals, \$96 million on pregnancies and \$104 million on newborns, \$91.5 million on dental services, and \$433 million on nursing homes, according to Stensland.

The Medicaid budget for 2008 is expected to be \$5.4 billion, with about \$1.5 billion of it in state funds and the rest in federal money.

The new Web site ó [www.scdhhs.org](http://www.scdhhs.org) and click on Medicaid Transparency Database ó provides information about the nearly 30,000 health care providers in South Carolina who participate in the Medicaid program, such as their reimbursements as well as the number of patients they saw. It also will help DHHS locate "unusual billing patterns."

DHHS director Emma Forkner said in a statement that transparency "is key to ensuring accountability from government agencies and those who get paid by them."

Barney Osborne, vice president of finance for the South Carolina Hospital Association, said transparency in quality and price is a national trend the trade group supports. SCHA already reports quality data on its Web site and is "considering options for making price data available as well," he said.

And South Carolina Medical Association president Dr. Richard A. Schmitt said he didn't think the data will have much impact on doctors.

"Greater transparency and more disclosure is fine as long as the information is accurate and reflects true costs," he said. "Greater transparency for the public and the patients is a good thing in general."

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