



**BlueCross BlueShield
of New Mexico**

Economics of Health Care

Identifying health care costs

The rising costs of health care create an unsustainable burden on consumers, employers and government. It's important that members of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico (BCBSNM), a division of Health Care Service Corporation, a Mutual Legal Reserve Company, as well as the general public, know how health insurance premium dollars are being spent. More important, there is a need for education and awareness about what truly drives costs and how to help keep down these expenses. While most Americans use health care, few really know where their money goes and what medical care and services actually cost.

Federal government data confirms that rising health care costs are driven by increased spending on hospital care, physician services, prescription drugs and other medical services. As the dollar image on the next page illustrates, 87 percent of every health insurance premium dollar is used to pay for such direct medical care. These medical treatment costs are rising at two to three times faster than the rate of inflation. But with the greatest challenge comes the greatest opportunity.

Health care affordability

and sustainability depends on creating efficiencies within the **87 percent** of health care dollars directed toward health care providers.



Where does the typical health insurance dollar go?



Based on a PricewaterhouseCoopers' analysis. *Factors Fueling Rising Health Care Costs 2008*.

Patient Services (35%) – According to a study by Thomson Reuters, the average profit margin of America's hospitals reached more than 8 percent in the second quarter of 2009.¹ Hospitals, especially those with strong market power, have reaped higher revenues from private payers. This has led to weaker cost controls and higher costs per unit of service. Data gathered by the American Hospital Association revealed that, from 1999 to 2007, private insurers' payment-to-cost ratio increased **17 percent**, while Medicare's same payment-to-cost ratio decreased **9 percent**.² This process is shifting the costs from Medicare to private insurers, requiring them to pay increasingly more.

Inpatient Services – Inpatient services include items and services ordinarily furnished by the hospital for the care and treatment of patients staying overnight. Patients may be admitted to the hospital for various reasons – giving birth, undergoing surgery, etc. In New Mexico, the average costs for childbirth are \$6,100 for a normal delivery and \$8,000 for a C-section delivery. The total charges of a hip replacement can cost up to **\$28,000**.³

Outpatient Services – Outpatient hospital services include less complicated procedures that do not require an overnight stay in the hospital. These generally occur when an individual visits the hospital to prevent sickness, receive a diagnosis for an illness or medical condition, alleviate pain, or receive rehabilitation services. Emergency room visits also can be an outpatient service. Claims data from the period of April 2009 through March 2010 shows that BCBSNM members were charged an average of **\$1,982** per emergency room visit, including facility and professional charges.



Physician Services (33%) – Physician services include the cost of patient care, such as salaries, facilities, technology and medical malpractice lawsuits.

Prescription Drug Costs (14%) – In February, *Forbes* magazine released its list of the most expensive drugs, including one drug that cost **\$409,500** for a year's supply – meaning it costs more than \$1,000 per day, every day, all year.⁴ Some people argue that such prices are necessary due to drug research, development, manufacturing and marketing. However, the pharmaceutical industry benefits from a **19 percent** profit margin and is currently ranked the third most profitable industry in America.⁵

Other Medical Services (5%) – These costs include durable medical equipment, orthotics, therapy, hospice, skilled nursing services and other ancillary provider services.

Administrative and Government Costs (6%) – Payments to the government include taxes and compliance. These costs also include claims processing and other administrative costs.

Consumer Services (4%) – These costs include prevention services that help members stay healthy, as well as medical management programs, provider support and health information technology investments – all of which help to avoid millions of dollars a year in unnecessary medical costs.

Insurer Margin (3%) – On average, health insurers operate with a 3 percent margin. BCBSNM, as a Division of Health Care Service Corporation, operated at a loss in 2009 and projects a loss again in 2010. As a non-investor-owned company, we do not trade stock publicly. The non-investor-owned model ensures that the monthly rates members pay are put to good use. Now, more than ever, health care customers need this structure and certainty.





No simple task

Controlling health care costs is no simple task and will require the combined effort of the government, insurers, providers and the general public. As economic difficulties may pressure healthy individuals to go without insurance, the market includes a disproportionate number of unhealthy people who incur higher health costs. In addition, unemployment drives up the number of uninsured and increases the use of expensive visits to the emergency room.

BCBSNM is one of the largest health insurance companies in the state and makes every effort to keep its coverage affordable and accessible to all New Mexicans. We're committed to working with hospitals, physicians and employers to provide access to quality medical care at competitive rates. Many other insurance carriers in New Mexico are for-profit; therefore, they focus their attention on the locations with the most reliable profitability.

As a non-investor-owned company, our members are our shareholders, and we operate our business to their benefit. While investor-owned or publicly traded companies are forced to maximize shareholder value, we do not have this burden. This freedom allows us to better align our incentives and concentrate all our resources on our customers. The non-investor-owned model also enables us to focus on the long-term needs of policyholders instead of the short-term gains of shareholders.



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1. America's Health Insurance Plans. PricewaterhouseCoopers' *Factors Fueling Rising Healthcare Costs*, 2008.
2. American Hospital Association and Avalere Health *TrendWatch Chartbook 2010: Trends in Hospital Financing*. 2010.
3. Based on the average range of charges for these services in New Mexico, as of June 2010, according to the Care Comparison Tool®, WebMD, LLC. The relationship between Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico and WebMD is solely that of independent contractors.
4. Forbes Magazine. "The World's Most Expensive Drugs." Feb. 22, 2010.
5. Fortune Magazine. Annual Ranking of the Largest Corporations – Top Industries: Most Profitable. 2009.