

Kasich hopes more healthy babies will reduce Medicaid costs

Initiatives focus on low-weight babies, poor's visits to ER

By Catherine Candisky and Joe Vardon

Reducing the number of low-weight babies born in Ohio will be one of the initiatives to lower health-care costs that Gov. John Kasich is expected to unveil in his state budget next week.

The proposal will be part of a broader effort by the Republican's administration to rein in Medicaid spending by reducing hospitalization and other high-cost care covered by the tax-funded program, which provides health care to 2million poor and disabled Ohioans.

Yesterday, Kasich discussed low birth-weight babies and another initiative to reduce the cost of home visits by nurses and other health-care aides.

"They're just rushing in and getting their 56 bucks and then they're going to the next one and the next one; that's not what we want out of home health care," Kasich said. "We want to make sure there are people in there really doing their jobs."

Nurses are paid \$54.95 for the first hour and \$5.69 for every 15 minutes after, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services says. However, each patient visit starts the clock anew at the \$54.95 rate.

The initiative to help low-weight infants was a surprise - even to some of Kasich's advisers - in his State of the State speech this week.

The governor's Office of Health Transformation projects that taxpayers could save more than \$155 million in Medicaid costs if hospital stays for tiny newborns are reduced.

"We're going to do a better job of taking care of low birth-weight babies by taking better care of their mothers," the governor pledged.

Newborns with low birth weights who must remain hospitalized for serious health problems "incur six times the costs of other babies," he said.

The governor proposed that the state could reverse the trend by "staying in touch" with the mothers and providing the "prenatal care they need so we don't have more low-weight babies born."

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