

For immediate release

For more information:
Bill Rencher (404) 525-1085

Supreme Court ruling good news for Georgia health care consumers

June 28, 2012 – Today, the United States Supreme Court upheld most of the provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), but narrowly construed the federal government’s ability to require state expansion of Medicaid. While the court’s upholding of most of the ACA is good for Georgia consumers, the ruling on Medicaid means that Georgia could refuse to expand Medicaid without incurring a penalty.

“Most of today’s ruling is really a huge victory for Georgia’s health care consumers,” says Bill Rencher, Georgia Watch Health Access Program director. According to Rencher, several portions of the ACA upheld today have already benefitted millions of Georgians. For example:

- The ability of parents to keep their children on their health insurance up to age 26 has benefitted 85,000 of young Georgians,
- Temporary high risk pools for those denied coverage for pre-existing conditions (to be phased out in 2014, when the law will prohibit the denial of coverage to anyone with a pre-existing condition) have provided coverage to more than 2,000 who previously lacked insurance,
- The removal of lifetime caps has benefitted those with costly chronic diseases, and
- Many preventive services, such as mammograms and annual check-ups are now completely covered by insurance, meaning no co-pays or deductibles for preventive care for millions of Georgians.

Furthermore, the court’s upholding of the insurance mandate means that the law’s requirement, to be enacted in 2014, that no one can be denied coverage for a pre-existing condition can be effectively implemented by insurance companies. Georgians who, up until now, have been unable to purchase health insurance because of their medical status will be able to so.

However, the narrowing of the Medicaid requirement allows for states to in effect opt out of the Medicaid expansion. Given the historical opposition of Georgia’s political leadership to the ACA, there is uncertainty whether Georgia will expand its Medicaid program. That would deprive the poorest Georgians the full benefit of the new law. “We urge Georgia’s political leadership to move forward immediately with Medicaid expansion and creation of Georgia’s free-market health care exchange to gain coverage for uninsured Georgians,” says Elena Parent, Georgia Watch’s Executive Director. “Georgia Watch looks forward to working to ensure that the Act is fully and effectively implemented.”

Today’s decision most likely will not be the last word on health care reform. Presidential candidate Mitt Romney has vowed to get the ACA overturned during his first 100 days as president, if elected. If President Obama wins re-election, “the issue will shift to the manner in which Georgia enacts its parts of the new law,” according to Rencher. How that will affect Georgia health care consumers remains to be seen.

Founded in 2002, Georgia Watch is a non-profit, nonpartisan 501-(c)(3) watchdog group focusing on consumer education and research in the areas of consumer energy, health care, insurance, identity theft and personal finance.