

Oregon House approves expansion of prescription drug pool

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Passing of Senate Bill 362 should ensure affordable medication, cut costs for Oregon businesses

Salem — The Oregon House of Representatives today voted unanimous approval of Senate Bill 362, which would harness the state's bulk purchasing power to make prescription drugs more affordable for individual Oregonians, employer-sponsored health plans and labor organizations.

“The skyrocketing cost of health care and prescription drugs in particular has meant that families, children and seniors have for too long gone without both lifesaving and preventative medicines,” said State Representative Sara Gelser (D-Corvallis), who made the Democrat's case for the bill on the House floor. “Pooling as a way to solve this crisis makes sense. It's smart government. It's good for business. It benefits families. It's simply the right thing to do.”

Democrats say the bill is necessary because rising costs have forced many families to go without prescription drug coverage or forced small businesses to drop that coverage as part of their employer-sponsored health plans.

“As a small businessman, I know the strains that health care costs have put on Oregon small businesses and how reducing those benefits has hurt the ability of small businesses to compete with larger companies who can still afford comprehensive health coverage for employees,” said State Representative Chris Edwards (D-Eugene). “This bill not only improves the health of Oregonians but also provides a pathway for small Oregon businesses to restore their competitive edge.”

Through the expansion of Oregon's existing Oregon Prescription Drug Program, small businesses and labor organizations can purchase prescription drugs for their own employer-sponsored health plans through the pool, giving Oregon businesses much greater leverage and larger discounts than they would otherwise have under their own smaller group insurance plan. Under-insured Oregonians can also access prescription drug coverage through the pool.

“We all benefit from a healthier Oregon,” said State Representative Jean Cowan (D-Newport). “Today we have taken one more step in ensuring more accessible, more affordable health care for all Oregonians.”

This new plan, combined with the prescription drug coverage expansion resulting from the passage of Measure 44 in 2006 means that all Oregonians now have access to affordable prescription drug coverage.

“For years, House Republican Leadership blocked bills that would have brought health care and prescription drug costs under control in Oregon,” said House Majority Leader Dave Hunt (D-Clackamas County). “Today’s vote demonstrates what we have known all along: that when good ideas are allowed to see the light of day in the House, good people on both sides of the aisle will stand up for what is right.”

Senate Bill 362 now awaits the signature of Governor Ted Kulongoski.

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