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Conference examines \$1T health care reform effort

By [Martin C. Daks](#)

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Business owners and executives crowded into the "NJBIZ Inside View: Health Care Reform" conference Tuesday morning at the **Imperia** conference center, in the Somerset section of Franklin Township, to get answers about upcoming federal health care reform mandates.

Against the backdrop of business owners' complaints of soaring increases in health care premiums, keynote speaker **Heather Howard**, former commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, and a panel of private-sector experts addressed a host of issues. But by the event's end, two conclusions were clear: many unanswered questions about reform remain, and health care costs are likely to go up before trending down.

"The problem is that we're pouring more than \$1 trillion into health care reforms that will continue to reward inefficiency," said **Steven I. Kern**, a panelist and president of **Kern, Augustine, Conroy & Schoppmann P.C.**, a Marlton-based law firm that represents physicians. "The new regulations ignore market forces, and its rewards are based on volume, not quality."



Heather Howard (Christina Mazza/NJIZ photo)

On May 11, the Congressional Budget Office announced that health care reform costs likely would reach higher than \$1 trillion, up from previous estimates of about \$940 billion.

Even though the law offers tax credits to small business to help offset the increased costs, "you need to be a genius" to understand the process, said panelist **David Oscar**, president of the New Jersey Association of Health Underwriters.

Part of the reason health care costs keep rising is that "premiums are driven up by increased utilization, and charges related to physician services, prescription drugs and other factors," said **Lawrence B. Altman**, vice president of health care reform with **Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey**. "Medical advances do carry costs."

Technological advances also can be costly, and the reform's emphasis on electronic medical records and payment systems is likely to be costly for small medical practices, said panelist Dr. **Donald Cinotti**, who's also president of the Medical Society of New Jersey.

"In the long run, advances like electronic medical records will help to cut costs," he said. "But in the meantime, smaller practices will have a difficult time paying for them."

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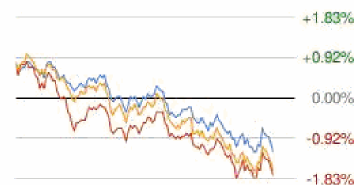
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