

Legislative initiatives could affect Nevadans' health

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The midpoint of the 2015 legislative session provides a perfect opportunity to take stock of proposed legislation that could affect health and health care in Nevada for years to come.

Nevada lawmakers are poised to make the most meaningful changes to medical education in a generation if they approve start-up funding for a UNLV medical school and an additional \$10 million for graduate medical education contained in Governor Sandoval's budget. These measures stand to address serious physician workforce shortages in Nevada by increasing the number of "home grown" doctors educated and trained in both Reno and Las Vegas.

Likewise for tobacco control and prevention policy, where lawmakers are considering various bills that would regulate e-cigarettes and liquid nicotine, extend smoking bans contained in the Nevada Clean Indoor Air Act to college campuses, and increase cigarette taxes for the first time in a dozen years – the latter is an evidence-based twofer that would decrease smoking among young Nevadans and add millions to the state's general fund.

Legislators are also considering a number of bills that stand to improve access to and the quality of health care in Nevada, including an innovative proposal authorizing the development of community paramedicine services, another clarifying the reimbursement and regulation of medical consultations provide by telehealth technology, and separate bills ratifying and enacting interstate compacts in medicine and mental health.

Finally, it bears noting that the Governor's proposed investments in K-12 education – and related revenue-raising bills (a.k.a. new taxes) to underwrite improvements in education – are not only critical for generating higher paying jobs and improving economic productivity in our state, expanding educational opportunities will improve health in a variety of ways that will translate into lower spending on medical care we're capable of preventing in the first place.

The most noteworthy exception to these largely bipartisan, pro-health proposals is the slew of gun bills introduced by Republican legislators in both houses.

Assembly Bill 148, for example, would allow concealed weapons on college campuses. In addition to opposition by a majority of students, faculty (a recent poll of UNR faculty found 85% opposed to the bill), and campus presidents, AB 148's supporters purport to be addressing a public safety problem that simply doesn't exist.

For example, in 2013, there were 0 aggravated assaults on the UNR campus, as compared to more than a thousand aggravated assaults in the rest of Reno. There is no evidence that expanding campus carry improves safety or promotes the health and well-being of those who work and study on college campuses.

Unlike the last couple of revenue-challenged legislative sessions, there are plenty of health-related bills that deserve lawmaker's support and the Governor's signature. The public health community simply urges state policymakers to adopt evidence-based policy responses to the major health issues facing our state that are grounded in the most currently available science.

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