

CONNECTIONS

Education News From Northeastern Connecticut

ECHIP: A Regional Health Insurance Success Story

Now entering its fourth year, the Eastern Connecticut Health Insurance Program (ECHIP) continues to fulfill the promise of long-term savings as both its town and school district members reap the rewards of regional collaboration.

"ECHIP continues to be an excellent example of regional efficiencies, as well as true collaboration between towns and boards of education," said Steve Werbner, Chairman of ECHIP and Tolland Town Manager. "Tolland this year has seen the lowest percentage increase in its health renewal in at least the last 10 years, which can be attributed in large part to the cost-savings provided through the purchasing power of the ECHIP organization."



During its recent annual meeting, the ECHIP board discussed the year ahead, health insurance renewal numbers and several exciting new initiatives that will benefit the collaborative's members.

The Town of Tolland and Tolland Public Schools are among the founding members of ECHIP, Connecticut's first self-insured health insurance collaborative, made possible by state legislation passed in 2010. Public Act 10-174 allowed municipalities and boards of education to join forces to purchase employee health insurance. Working with Cigna, ECHIP was officially launched in 2012 with members that included EASTCONN, as well as the towns and school districts of Coventry, Putnam, Plainfield and Tolland.

The collaborative was the first of its kind in the state.

Altogether, the ECHIP health insurance collaborative represents more than 4,000 school and municipal employees. Over the last three years, aggregated health insurance renewals have resulted in an average savings of between 1% and 7% for ECHIP members, according to ECHIP Administrator Larisa Carr.

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Larisa Carr, Administrator of the Eastern Connecticut Health Insurance Program (ECHIP), a regional health insurance collaborative of which EASTCONN is a member, recently met with U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney to discuss the Affordable Care Act and its effects on insurance costs.

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"It has been a wonderful partnership, as all of our ECHIP members continue to experience year-over-year savings against regional medical insurance trends," said Carr.

Putnam Public Schools Superintendent William Hull was matter-of-fact about the good things that have come to his district because of ECHIP.

"ECHIP has allowed us to control our health care costs," Hull said, simply. "For the past two years, we have had zero-percent increases in our costs for medical insurance."

Coventry's Finance Director Beth Bauer said ECHIP membership has given her town a distinct advantage.

"Joining with ECHIP has given the Town of Coventry the ability to reduce costs and to collaborate with other communities on wellness programs," said Bauer. "We have come further as a member of the partnership than would have been possible alone, and are looking forward to continued progress."

Ron Lussier, Board of Education Business Manager for Plainfield Public Schools, said Plainfield schools have also benefited.

"... We find ourselves in the unique position of being able to offer a reduction in health insurance premiums to our employees," said Lussier. "Through the effective actions of employee awareness and wellness programs and health/risk assessments, our employees have helped maintain manageable utilization rates. This translates directly into healthier individuals and saves our district money."

"EASTCONN is very pleased about the expanding number of cost-saving initiatives that ECHIP continues to pursue in areas that include dental, student accident insurance and pharmacy coverage," said EASTCONN Executive Director Paula M. Colen.

As a result of ECHIP's success, Werbner, Hull and Carr were invited in May to present information about the collaborative to the Connecticut Legislature's MORE Commission Sub-Committee on Municipal Efficiencies.

"It was an exciting opportunity to share information about ECHIP's success as a regional, cost-savings strategy for both schools and municipalities," said Carr. The MORE Commission is investigating regional efficiencies that may save Connecticut taxpayer dollars.

Werbner, who is a member of the MORE Commission's Municipal Efficiencies Sub-Committee, summed up Tolland's feelings about ECHIP.

"We look forward to working closely with the members of ECHIP in future years to further improve offerings to members, with the continued goal of maintaining affordable benefit plans for our employees," he said.

Lussier added, "The Plainfield Board of Education looks forward to many more years in partnership with other members of the collaborative. I believe we have only scratched the surface of the good things to come out of our relationships in ECHIP."

To learn more, contact Larisa Carr at lcarr@eastconn.org, or at 860-455-0707. Visit ECHIP's Web site at www.echipct.org.