

EDITORIAL.

A Message from the Adirondacks

The Adirondack Regional Medical Home Pilot Project was formally introduced to the public at a meeting held at the Warren County Municipal Center on October 13. While an experiment in the delivery and funding of health care in a few counties in the Adirondacks may seem incidental to the national debate on health care reform now underway, it's not. As Rashi Fein, the Bolton Landing summer resident who's a professor emeritus at Harvard Medical School told us, the cost per capita of health insurance will only continue to rise if reforms like those at the center of the Adirondack project are not implemented nation-wide. (Massachusetts, which mandates health insurance but has not mandated reforms in the delivery of health care, now has one of the most expensive systems in the country, Fein said.) Physicians participating in the project will devote more time to preventive care, early detection and treatment when illness strikes, and coordinated care for people coping with chronic conditions. According to the speakers at October's health summit, that should result in fewer hospital admissions, less frequent referrals to specialists, lower prescription costs, healthier lives and, ultimately, a less expensive health care system for everyone. The Adirondack Regional Medical Home Pilot Project will be watched by policy makers in Albany and Washington to see if clinical outcomes improve. Its potential benefits have already been demonstrated by the Geisinger Health System in Pennsylvania. Its medical home program reduced costly hospital admissions by 20 percent, saving seven percent of total medical costs. (Insurance companies appear to suspect that it is less expensive to reimburse primary care providers at higher rates for expanded responsibility for coordinating care, providing preventive care and managing chronic diseases; that's why they're participating in the experiment.) Without these kinds of reforms, the costs to the nation as a whole of a more equitable health care system of the kind now being debated in Washington may well be unsustainable. That's the message from the Adirondacks.