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Three Options To Be Proposed For Universal Health Care

By E.B. Solomont

Preliminary plans for at least three options for providing New Yorkers with universal health insurance coverage are likely to be drawn up this summer, state health and insurance officials reported yesterday.

In an “interim report” to Governor Paterson, officials provided a snapshot of their efforts so far to devise a plan for expanding health insurance coverage. Most recently, they said, the state awarded a contract to the Urban Institute to devise three models for coverage based on the expertise of industry stakeholders.

Under the direction of Governor Spitzer, officials last year convened a series of public hearings and invited stakeholders to share their concerns and proposals for expanding coverage. Based on testimony given at the public hearings, officials reported that the majority of stakeholders favor sharing the responsibility for insuring all New Yorkers. Many sup-

port changes to the existing public health insurance programs. They also favor a single-payer system of coverage, officials reported.

In a statement, the state’s health commissioner, Dr. Richard Daines, called the testimony of more than 270 individuals at the hearings “quite compelling.” The state’s insurance superintendent, Eric Dinallo, said: “The public hearings were invaluable to us in better understanding the problems New Yorkers face every day, both in obtaining affordable health insurance and, for those that have it, in using their health insurance.”

Still, any changes are not likely to be achieved quickly, insiders said. With a recession looming, officials are being sensitive to next year’s budget.

“There’s a strong feeling that they need to move incrementally,” the director of the Rockefeller Institute’s New York State Health Policy Research Center, Courtney Burke, said. “It does take time to build consensus on what you want to do.”