

The Enzi Bill: Bad Medicine for South Dakota

From Families USA ■ March 29, 2006

Congress is considering S. 1955, the Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act, sponsored by Senator Michael Enzi of Wyoming. If this legislation becomes law, more than 260,000 South Dakotans will lose important consumer protections that now apply to their health insurance.

- **The Enzi bill overrides important South Dakota laws that regulate health insurance plans. This legislation** will allow insurers to offer plans without the benefits, services, and providers that the state legislature has identified as critical for South Dakotans. These changes apply to the small group, large group, and individual health insurance markets.
 - **Medical treatment protections lost in South Dakota:** Alcoholism treatment, dental anesthesia, diabetic supplies and education, emergency services, mammography screening, mental health parity, metabolic disorders/PKU, off-label drug use, and prostate cancer screening.
 - **Access to provider protections lost in South Dakota:** Chiropractors, dentists, licensed health professionals, nurse midwives, nurse anesthetists, nurse practitioners, optometrists, osteopaths, physician's assistants, podiatrists, professional counselors, psychiatric nurses, psychologists, and social workers.

These protections are the result of years of consumer advocacy and thoughtful consideration by South Dakota state legislators. Not only does the Enzi bill wipe out these existing laws, but it also prevents South Dakota state legislators from making decisions in the future about even minimal protections for the state's health care consumers.

- **The Enzi bill sets aside state laws that protect consumers in the small group market from discriminatory pricing practices.** Taking a step opposed by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, the Enzi bill would allow insurers to charge small businesses as much as 50 percent more for premiums if some of their workers are in less-than-perfect health. It would also allow unlimited premium increases based on the sex or age of workers or on other demographic factors.
- **The Enzi bill forces consumers to choose between accepting barebones policies and paying higher rates for the more comprehensive coverage they need.** Many people who need comprehensive coverage will wind up with much higher premiums than they pay today, making health insurance unaffordable for many more people.
- **The Enzi bill increases the cost of insurance for many small businesses by pitting younger, healthier groups against older, sicker groups.** Existing consumer protections that regulate how much insurers can raise premiums when a small business renews coverage would be set aside. Small businesses—even those with just one sick worker—could see their premiums rise sharply.