

## States study Massachusetts health-care law

By Christine McConville | Thursday, November 18, 2010 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | [Healthcare](#)

It's all eyes on Massachusetts' first-in-the-nation universal health care, as Americans come to terms with their own future under President Obama's universal health-care legislation.

The Herald reported yesterday that Bay State officials have hired private lawyers to sue people who claim they can't afford health care and can't pay the \$2,000 fines they were levied.

And at conference tables nationwide, other states' officials are scrutinizing the Commonwealth Health Insurance Connector Authority and how it's enforcing the state's mandatory health coverage law.

"Yes, we're looking at it," said Michael Nunez, executive director of the New Mexico Health Insurance Alliance, the state agency that helps New Mexicans sort through insurance plans. "So are people in Colorado, Oregon, Montana and Idaho."

In New Mexico, where nearly 30 percent of the people don't have health insurance, enforcement is a concern, Nunez said. "It's a difficult road," he said. "We have a strong exchange to bring people into, and there's a lot of discussion about how to do it."

At the Cato Institute, a Washington, D.C., libertarian-leaning think tank, health policies director Michael Cannon said enforcement will be difficult but necessary, because people will skirt the law if they think they can.

"We should be looking at (Massachusetts) to see what our future is," he said.

Four years after Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to require all residents to have health insurance, Connector spokesman Richard Powers said with 97 percent of Massachusetts taxpayers insured, the program so far has been an overwhelming success. Officials are now trying to lower health-care costs. "If the rest of the nation is as lucky as Massachusetts, the entire country will be better off," he said.

But Cannon disagreed: "It was sold as a way to cover uninsured and then reduce cost of health care. It has covered some previously uncovered people, but not as many as the commonwealth claims they have covered, and the cost of health care is rising, by every measure, while the quality is falling."

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