

# The Detroit News

## Forum offers ideas on better-informing public about health care law

By Karen Bouffard

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Ann Arbor —Consumers are still woefully in the dark about [health care reform](#), and communication about Obamacare needs to focus on details of the law as well as the politics, according to health policy experts and top national health care journalists meeting at the University of Michigan Monday.

“Hearsay or Fact: A Symposium on the communication of the Affordable Care Act” brought together conservative and liberal policymakers, and [health](#) care reporters from the New York Times, Washington Post, New Republic and other media. Journalists included National Public Radio’s Julie Rovner and Steven Brill, author of “The Bitter Pill,” Time magazine’s March special report on health care costs, who participated by Skype. It was hosted by the University of Michigan’s Center for Healthcare Research and Transformation and other groups.

Heather Howard, director of the State Health Reform Assistance Network, which provides technical assistance to states implementing the Affordable Care Act, said the launch of [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov) has been “rocky, uncertain and politically charged,” but as glitches with the website are resolved the public conversation has begun to shift toward educating consumers.

“States have to break through with credible information for consumers,” Howard said. “I think we will begin to see more success stories from across the country and that will help shift the narrative.”

Dr. John Ayanian, director of Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation at the University of Michigan, said states that did not sign onto the Medicaid expansion allowed under the Affordable Care Act will be watching how well the expansion works in states like Michigan, where as many as 470,000 low-income residents could be added to the Medicaid rolls.

“There will be opportunity for states that rejected Medicaid expansion to reconsider,” Ayanian said.

Michael Cannon, director of health policy for the free-market Cato Institute, spurred debate over whether the law will really bring down [health care](#) costs.

Cannon also questioned whether reporting on the law has been impartial, saying “All the truths that we’re hearing here are truths that are (supportive) of the law.”