

# Trends Forum:

## A Look Ahead in Alaska

In the midst of budget debates and partisan battles, many state officials are so busy dealing with pressing, immediate issues that they don't get the chance to look ahead. In September, state officials from around the country will step out of their normal routines to examine issues that are just as important as the day-to-day problems, but that require some long-term planning and an eye toward the future.

Here are a few of the topics CSG's policy task forces and committees will consider during the joint 2004 State Trends and Leadership Forum/CSG-WEST Annual Meeting in Anchorage, Alaska Sept. 25-29.

### Health Care Quality: Improving Care and Controlling Costs

Some experts believe that as much as 30 percent to 40 percent of our health care spending goes to poor quality care. A recent national report found that the health care quality chasm is responsible for 57,000 avoidable deaths, 41 million sick days, and \$11 billion in lost productivity each year.

Given the expense and how lapses in quality affect constituents' lives, state policy-makers can't afford to overlook the role of quality in purchasing, providing, studying and regulating health care. "The economic costs of lost productivity, the health care costs of life-threatening complications, and the personal costs of limited fulfillment are costs our state can ill afford to pay," said Dr. Lawrence Harkless, chairman of the Texas Diabetes Council and professor of medicine at the University of Texas Health Sciences Center in San Antonio.

Some states have stepped up to the plate, infusing quality into their health care decision-making process. For example, for its behavioral health program, Iowa Medicaid ties financial incentives and penalties to performance measures. Contractors can be rewarded for nine performance measures, including the rate of



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emergency room visits for mental health or substance abuse treatment per 1,000 enrollees and the percentage of discharge plans that are implemented. They can be penalized for 10 performance measures, such as the timeliness of new enrollee information being mailed and the percentage of children discharged to a shelter.

Utah offers a financial incentive to contractors for its Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment program, known as the Child Health Evaluation and Care program. This program provides comprehensive health and developmental histories, immunizations, vision and hearing screenings, and periodic dental care, among other services. The goal was to increase the number of eligible children receiving services to 80 percent. Since implementation, participation rates have generally improved with some plans achieving rates above the target.

Other examples of state quality initiatives can be found in *Diabetes Care Quality Improvement: A Resource Guide for State Action*. This publication is a joint effort by CSG, Medstat and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to identify innovative models and best practices among state diabetes care programs. The guide contains data from the *National Healthcare Quality Report* and the *National Healthcare Disparities Report* that will help state officials assess the quality of diabetes care in their states and map out a plan for improvement.

CSG has invited a panel of national experts to examine the issue of health care quality during the Health Policy Task Force meeting at CSG's 2004 Annual State Trends and Leadership Forum. The session will take place Monday, Sept. 27 at 2:00 p.m.

—Jenny Sewell, senior health policy analyst, [jsewell@csg.org](mailto:jsewell@csg.org)

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## Electricity Transmission Expansion: Is a Federal Solution Really Needed?

Events such as the recent blackouts in the Midwestern and Northeastern United States have heightened public concern and highlighted the critical need to upgrade and expand the nation's electricity transmission capacity. However, formidable obstacles exist to achieving that goal in an efficient and timely manner.

There are 157,810 miles of electricity transmission lines in the United States, according to the National Energy Policy Report prepared by the Bush administration's National Energy Policy Development Group. Only 7,000 miles of new transmission lines are projected to be put in place in the coming decade—far short of the anticipated increase in demand for electricity during that time.

Electric transmission lines are designed to carry electrical power from the source of generation to the end-user. As there is generally no storage capacity, electricity moves at the speed of light over these transmission lines. This requires an incredibly sophisticated level of coordination to ensure sufficient output to reliably meet the demand for electricity within the power grid—a system of interlocking transmission lines serving a particular geographic area.

Among the most significant impediments to expanding the nation's power grid are the difficulties in permitting and siting of new regional transmission lines that cross through several states. Different states often have differing permitting processes and requirements, as well as varying opinions regarding the costs and benefits of a proposed project.

The National Energy Policy and many people within the utility industry advocate granting general siting authority to the federal government, much in the same way that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission currently regulates natural gas transmission. In addition, there is a growing demand to increase transmission for renewable energy generating sources, such as wind farms, which often lack an adequate means to get their electricity to consumers.

On Tuesday, Sept. 28 at the Annual State Trends and Leadership Forum, the CSG Environmental Task Force will explore the issues relating to electricity transmission infrastructure expansion, siting difficulties and environmental considerations. Experts from federal and state regulatory agencies, along with representatives from the electrical utility industry, will present their perspectives and offer solutions to help resolve the pressing need to increase transmission capacity and reliability, while protecting natural resources and environmental quality.

—Ron Scott, environmental policy analyst, [rscott@csg.org](mailto:rscott@csg.org)

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