

Insurance plan penalizes smokers, obese

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The director of a U.S. anti-smoking organization says smokers and obese people should pay substantially more for health insurance than others.

John Banzhaf, director of the Washington organization Action on Smoking and Health said he's urging state governors to adopt his plan in reforming their Medicaid programs.

Under the plan, obese people would pay a 10-percent increased health insurance premium, with smokers generally paying an even higher percentage. Those who are obese and smoke would pay nearly 30 percent more to obtain health insurance.

"While a growing number of health insurance companies are now charging smokers higher premiums, and a few state governments have started charging employees who smoke more for health coverage, this may be the first situation in which the concept is applied to Medicaid," Banzhaf said in a release.

While noting increasing the premium penalty beyond a certain point might cause some to do without insurance, Banzhaf said correspondingly lower rates for non-smokers would probably help many of them obtain coverage that was previously financially out of bounds.

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