

# Study finds need for improvement on state health care price websites

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"With rising health care costs and 30 percent of privately insured adults enrolled in high-deductible health care plans, calls for greater health care price transparency are increasing. In response, health plans, consumer groups, and state governments are increasingly reporting health care prices. Despite recognition that price information must be relevant, accurate, and usable to improve the value of patients' out-of-pocket expenditures, and the potential for this reporting to affect health care organizations and prices, there are no data on what kind of price information is being reported," writes Jeffrey T. Kullgren, M.D., M.S., M.P.H., of the Veterans Affairs Ann Arbor Healthcare System, Ann Arbor, Mich., and colleagues.

As reported in a Research Letter, the authors conducted a study to examine the characteristics of state health care price websites and identify opportunities for improving the utility of this information. Systematic Internet searches were conducted between January and May 2012 to identify publicly available, patient-oriented websites hosted by a state specific institution (e.g., a state government agency or hospital association) that enabled patients to estimate or compare prices for [health care services](#) in that state. For each website, a number of factors were examined, including classifying the reporting organization, year reporting started, patient information used to generate price estimates, and types of services for which price estimates were provided.

Among the findings and recommendations of the researchers: "Greater relevance to patients could be realized by focusing information on

services that are predictable, nonurgent, and subject to deductibles (e.g., routine outpatient care for [chronic diseases](#)) rather than services that are unpredictable, emergent, or would exceed most deductibles (e.g., hospitalizations for life-threatening conditions). Accuracy could be improved by reporting allowable charges for full episodes of care (i.e., aggregate prices for health care services that include all fees such as facility, professional, and other fees). Usability could be enhanced by presenting quality information alongside prices where applicable, as opposed to reporting just one type of data needed to assess value."

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