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President's message: Paving way to affordable health care

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If there is any one issue that is on everyone's mind, it's health care. The rising cost of health insurance remains one of the most pressing concerns for employers today, including ASM members. In an effort to stay ahead of the curve and offer real solutions to our members, the Associated Subcontractors of Massachusetts jumped at the opportunity to become one of six small business "health purchasing cooperatives," to be allowed under the state's new pilot program. As we recently reported, we were thrilled to receive notice from the Division of Insurance that we had been certified as the third cooperative in the state, effective July 1, 2012.

Certification as a cooperative will allow ASM to partner with major carriers in the state to offer health plans to our members, and receive a discount from rates offered to small businesses outside the cooperative. The discount will be determined by the carriers based on the cooperative's robust wellness program, and in the fourth year, by the accumulated claims experience of all employers in the cooperative. In other words, rates will be driven by factors never before available to small employers!

When we officially launch the plan this fall - November 1 is our target date - we hope that the ASM Health Insurance Co-op will offer members a range of choices for health coverage, including plans with several deductible options, as well as limited network and tiered network plans where employers could see immediate savings from standard plan designs, aside from the discounts provided by the health insurance carriers.

We also anticipate the cooperative will generate additional savings for members over the long term by way of the robust wellness program, powered by Fivi Health Networks.

While the insurance program will be available only to companies with up to 50 employees, the wellness program will be open to all companies regardless of size, and will provide an affordable option for companies for whom wellness programs are typically out of reach.

Additionally, you may be able to get some of your investment back. The health cost control legislation signed into law last month includes a tax credit for businesses that set up wellness programs for their employees. The credit is equal to 25% of setting up the program, up to a maximum of \$10,000.

We are excited to have the opportunity to provide sound, affordable options not previously available to small business owners. If you are currently shopping for new or replacement health insurance options for your small business, I would encourage you to contact ASM for more information, at 617-742-3412.

David Cannistraro is president of the Associated Subcontractors of Mass., Boston.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540