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Forum to discuss health care

BY PEGGY O'FARRELL | THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

Organizers of a Saturday town hall meeting on health care want to hear from "ordinary" people - not doctors or policymakers - about what's wrong and what's right with the nation's health-care system.

The Citizens' Health Care Working Group, an independent panel established by Congress in 2003, will hold its community meeting from 8:30 to 2 at the Cinergy Center downtown.

Health-care professionals are expected to attend, but organizers especially want to hear from consumers about their experiences - good or bad - with the health-care system.

"Hopefully a cross-section of the community will attend, a group that actually does reflect all the interests of the region," said Trey Daly, a senior attorney with the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati.

Participants will be asked to discuss four questions about health-care cost, access and quality, then come up with recommendations for improving those areas.

"There are 46 million people without insurance nationally, and people today across the nation are concerned about that," said Randy Johnson, chairman of the working group and a human resources spokesman for Motorola in Schaumburg, Ill.

"The average cost for health-care is \$6,300 per person, and it's expected to rise to more than \$12,000 per person by 2015," Johnson said. "For a family of four, that's an average cost of more than \$48,000. We can't continue to support these cost trends. In terms of quality, as patients, we only get 55 percent of the care that's recommended by experts. The entire system needs attention, and that's what these meetings are about."

Saturday's meeting is one of several scheduled across the country.

Input from the meetings will be compiled into a report for Congress and President Bush, said Johnson.

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