

As President Obama signed the second of two health care reform bills into law Tuesday, Rep. Peter Welch and four Vermonters spoke about the immediate benefits of the legislation at an assisted-living facility in South Burlington.

Welch highlighted provisions of the legislation that will take effect within the next year, including tax credits for small businesses, coverage for those with preexisting conditions, support for seniors in the Medicare prescription drug donut hole and expansion of family health insurance plans to those under the age of 26.

"Vermont families, seniors and businesses will immediately benefit from health care reform legislation," Welch said. "This year, Vermont families will be protected from insurance discrimination and will be able to keep young adults on their plans. This year, Vermont seniors will receive support for prescription drugs as the Medicare donut hole begins to close. And this year, Vermont's small businesses will receive tax credits to help them provide coverage to their employees."

Welch was joined at the event, which took place at Allenwood at Pillsbury Manor, by four Vermonters who described the difficulties they currently face and how the recently-passed legislation will help them.

Donna Watts of Plainfield described the hardship her son faced last year when he was seriously injured in an accident and not covered by health insurance. The health reform bill will allow 45,000 Vermont young adults under the age of 26 to remain on their parents' health insurance plans.

Karen Hammer-Williamson of Essex Junction spoke about how difficult it was for her to find health coverage because of a chronic condition she suffers from. Along with 7,000 other Vermonters with preexisting conditions, Hammer-Williamson will have access to insurance through a high-risk pool as the ban on insurance discrimination is enacted.

Jacquie Mitchell, a senior who lives at Pillsbury Manor, spoke about the difficulty of paying for 18 prescription drugs out-of-pocket because she falls within the Medicare donut hole. This year Medicare beneficiaries in the donut hole will receive a \$250 rebate, while next year they will receive a 50 percent discount on brand-name drugs. In the coming years, the donut hole will be phased out completely.

David Zahl, CEO of the Montpelier-based Signal Advertising, discussed how hard it was for his and other small businesses to afford health coverage for their employees. This year 20,800 Vermont small businesses will be eligible for tax credits up to 35 percent of premiums, and by 2014 those credits will cover up to 50 percent of premiums.

[Click here](#) for Rep. Welch's health care reform web resources. [Click here](#) for a list of immediate benefits and [here](#) for an implementation timeline.