



Metro

State's long-promised health-costs website is now due to arrive this spring

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For years, Massachusetts health policy makers have envisioned a website that could serve as a one-stop shop for consumers who want to know the price of a common medical test or procedure.

State officials are finally preparing to [launch such a website](#) this spring, months later than their previous self-imposed deadline, and with more tempered ambitions.

Officials at the Center for Health Information and Analysis, a state agency that serves as a clearinghouse for health care data and is required by law to create a public health care cost website, are stressing that the project is only a piece of a broader state goal of increasing transparency around medical costs.

The more modest tone comes about a year after they began the long-delayed effort of creating a website and started holding dozens of meetings with hospital leaders, doctors, and health insurers. Those meetings have highlighted a critical question: Instead of helping consumers, is this information going to confuse them?

“There’s a whole bunch of things that could be wrong with the site, including that nobody ever comes,” said Ray Campbell, executive director of the state agency, known as CHIA. “But the biggest danger that we confront is confusing people.”

The website, which has been tested by industry insiders over the past two months, shows payments to physicians and health care facilities for hundreds of outpatient medical services. The numbers represent the total amount an insurance company paid for a service, plus the amount paid out of the consumer’s pocket. So if a particular service was \$250, for example, that could include \$200 paid by the insurer and \$50 by the consumer.

The figures provide a snapshot of the sometimes wide cost difference for the same service at one health care provider versus another. One Boston-area hospital, for example, was paid \$257 for a mammogram, while another was paid \$439, and another was paid \$573, according to state data.

But consumers should not try to find their specific out-of-pocket costs for a mammogram, MRI, colonoscopy, or other service based solely on the state website, Campbell warned. For that, they should turn to their own insurance