

# Surviving the first year of the ACA

At this time a year ago, the nation in general and health care providers in particular were all in a tither about whether the rollout of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was going to be a boon or a boondoggle.

The answer, of course, was both. Despite a chaotic start to new insurance sign-ups through [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov), and the-world-is-ending prognostications from virtually all sides of the political spectrum, we survived. Here in Iowa, you could even claim we thrived.

The political compromises that resulted in the Iowa Health and Wellness Plan resulted in tens of thousands of Iowans gaining coverage that they didn't have before, provided hospitals and physicians with reimbursements for services they couldn't get before, and brought nearly a billion dollars of federal funds into Iowa that we wouldn't have gotten before.

That said, the year was not without its bumps. While thousands of Iowans were able to work their way through the new system, many struggled to figure out confusing and complex choices. Insurance coverage information for providers was incomplete at best, and changed month to month as individuals determined on their own if they were going to keep up with payments on plans that were not 100

percent subsidized.

The state as a whole was still trying to determine which insurers were going to participate in the new marketplace, which elements of the ACA were actually going to be enforced on employers and insurers, and how accurately those same insurers had predicted their prices and costs for coverage.

That latter issue was boldly illustrated by the December takeover of CoOpportunity Health by the Iowa insurance commissioner.

In a way, CoOpportunity appeared to be a victim of its own success. The two-state co-op enrolled roughly 100,000 Iowans and Nebraskans against an initial projection of less than half that. Depending on one's perspective, the problem came either from CoOpportunity underpricing itself, drawing more members with higher risks than anticipated, or from the federal government's decision to allow people to keep existing insurance plans that didn't meet ACA requirements, thereby depriving CoOpportunity of the chance to enroll previously insured and presumably healthier members to offset the higher-risk populations. Whatever the cause, the result was a clear example of the perils that came with the implementation of the ACA.



TED TOWNSEND is president and CEO of St. Luke's Hospital in Cedar Rapids.

To its credit, Iowa appears to be handling the transition well. Community groups of all stripes worked together across the state to help educate citizens about their new insurance choices, and well over 100,000 did so. Charity care and bad debt for both hospitals and physicians across the state appear to be markedly reduced.

There are still people without adequate coverage, and they are still getting cared for in times of duress, but access is challenging or directed to more expensive emergency room resources. The additional coverage choices are helping those people access care earlier, and hopefully at a lower cost.

At the same time, our state achieved a model that retains a modicum of individual responsibility for people of all income groups relative to their own health and payment for services. All in all, it's

typical Iowa: a practical, pragmatic set of solutions to what could have been either an explosive political stalemate or, even worse, an attempt to ignore that the problem existed at all.

There will be new challenges in 2015. CoOpportunity's early stumble leaves only one insurance carrier in the new government-mandated marketplace. To be a viable market, we need viable competition. We will need to decide — particularly if the U.S. Supreme Court rules against insurance subsidies in federally based insurance exchanges — whether Iowa moves ahead with the establishment of an Iowa-based marketplace that reflects the specific needs of Iowans, or whether we stick with the hybrid we have today.

While insurers and providers continue to reshape themselves for the much-heralded era of population health, there are a host of other issues coming down the pike. Iowa is one of only four states without a law covering telehealth services, one of the fastest growing and most innovative ways to deliver more cost-effective health care in the future. And we still haven't finished the transformation of delivering and paying for behavioral health services

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or visit [www.kirkwood.edu/safetyconference](http://www.kirkwood.edu/safetyconference).



## LOCAL FOOD

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The hospital tried a pilot program working with community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs once or twice a month to feature local foods. While the quality of food was good, the quantity wasn't.

"We had a volume problem, but it really was the right thing to do," Mr. Deutmeyer said. "When we say we need big volumes, we mean it. We can go through 50 pounds of cabbage a day."

According to Mr. Deutmeyer, Mercy serves 3,500 meals a

### Stat breakdown:

Highlights of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture's report, "2013 Economic Impacts of Iowa's Regional Food Systems Working Group," include:

- Surveyed farmers reported local sales of \$10.5 million in 2012, and more than \$13 million in 2013.

- Repeat respondents who participated in both years increased sales from \$9.2 million to nearly \$11 million.

- Food buyers reported making nearly \$9 million in local purchases in 2012 and \$13.1 million in 2013. Repeat respondents reported purchases of \$8.1 million in 2012 and \$9.6 million in 2013. Buyers included grocery stores, restaurants, K-12 schools, colleges, hospitals, nursing homes, caterers, camps and nonprofits.

- Half of the food buyers surveyed reported that they spent 18 percent of their food budgets on local foods. That's more than double the amount spent in 2012 (8.7 percent).

To download the full report, visit <http://bit.ly/leopoldreport>.



day to patients, visitors and staff, totaling about 1.25 million meals per year.

Despite the difficulties in finding producers who could provide adequate quantities, Mr. Deutmeyer and Pam Oldham, co-director of Food and Nutrition Services, pressed on in their effort to use as much local food as possible.

The tide began to change in 2011 after Mr. Deutmeyer was featured in a Mercy Touch magazine article. The article outlining the chef's desire to use local foods caught the eye of Fern Unruh, who had just opened Rolling Hills Farm in West Union with her husband, Eric, and son, Jason.

Rolling Hills had opened a 12,000-square-foot hydroponic greenhouse in April 2011 with hopes of being connected to a local food distributor, according to Jason Unruh. When

that fell through, Ms. Unruh brought a couple of heads of lettuce to Mercy to show Mr. Deutmeyer. He was pleasantly surprised when she told him Rolling Hills had 1,100 heads of lettuce at any given time.

"We were both looking for each other," Mr. Deutmeyer said. "It takes both of us — we count on each other."

After Ms. Unruh found success with Mercy, she told other producers of the hospital's need for large quantities of local food, who in turn contacted Mr. Deutmeyer and Ms. Oldham.

"One guy (Glen Yost of Yost Farms in West Union) brings 300 pounds of tomatoes a week," Mr. Deutmeyer said. "We started getting tomatoes, peppers, onions, strawberries — it just grew from there."

In 2012, Mercy used 20,000 pounds of local food, representing \$50,000 of its budget. By 2014, those numbers had doubled.

"We keep finding new growers," Ms. Oldham said. "Some have expanded because of us."

The local food is incorporated into the budget and doesn't cost more, Ms. Oldham said. For example, Mercy used to buy pre-sliced tomatoes, which cost more than whole tomatoes from local growers.

"Andy brought knife skills with him and was able to do it himself," Ms. Oldham said.

Local food not only is more cost-efficient, Mr. Deutmeyer said, but tastes better and is healthier than processed foods. The local offerings have become so popular at the Mercy cafeteria that some area residents and workers eat there for lunch.

"It is a restaurant that happens to be sitting in the middle of a hospital," Mr. Deutmeyer said.

### Reciprocal growth

Mercy's arrangement to buy large quantities of produce on a regular basis also greatly benefits producers.

"If given the choice to go around to several farmers markets a week or dropping off big quantities a once a week, they'll do this," Mr. Deutmeyer said.

Jason Unruh of Rolling Hills agreed with that sentiment. Last Tuesday, his route included trips to Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, the Quad Cities and Dubuque.

"We can go directly to the consumer with a fresher product at an affordable price," he said.

With the increasing push for local foods, Rolling Hills has increased sales since 2011 and completed an addition to its growing area in 2013, Mr. Unruh said.

While Mercy serves local foods all throughout the year, it will pick up in March and April with early asparagus. The primary growing season will remain steady though at least October, Ms. Oldham said.

"We start calling growers in February," Mr. Deutmeyer said, adding that Mercy is always willing to talk to new prospects.

"It takes time, and it takes the right grower," he said. "This is what they do. We've met their families, their kids are helping after school — it's good to see that." CBJ

## TOWNSEND

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in a new and better way based on regional approaches, versus 99 different county approaches.

Iowa will also need to respond to the possible adoption of an Interstate Physician Licensure Compact, which will allow physicians licensed in Iowa to offer services, particularly telehealth-based services, in other states and vice versa for physicians licensed in other states that have already adopted the compact. This step alone could have a major impact on the availability of services, particularly in rural areas, in ways we can't even imagine today.

That, of course, leaves plenty of room for unintended consequences, unforeseen situations and conflicting ideas — the resolving of which appears to be a uniquely admirable quality of this state.

Take a bow, Iowa. ●

## KRUSE

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Many other "ordinary" and "necessary" business costs qualify as deductions. They include business-related classes, seminars and conference fees, employees' pay, rent, interest, repairs to business equipment or facilities, retirement plans and more. IRS Publication 535, Business Expenses, available at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov), has complete explanations of all types of deductions and when they may be applied.

You can get advice about taxes or any other small business-related issue by contacting SCORE. Our organization offers a wealth of information resources, training and free counseling designed to help entrepreneurs start, grow and succeed nationwide. For more information about these services or taking one of our webinars, visit [www.score.org](http://www.score.org). ●

## OFF the CLOCK

### Chorale Midwest Fundraising Gala

Feb. 6, 7:30 p.m., and Feb. 7, 2:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Scottish Rite Temple, 616 A Ave. NE, Cedar Rapids

Attendees will enjoy food and spirits while listening to music from around the globe. Performances will include solo and small group numbers, as well as favorites performed by the Chorale Midwest choir. This is Chorale Midwest's second-annual fundraising event. Tickets: \$20. To purchase tickets, email [choralemidwest@gmail.com](mailto:choralemidwest@gmail.com).

### Salsa Night

Feb. 6, 10 p.m.

Wildwood Smokehouse and Saloon, 4919 B Wall-eye Drive SE, Iowa City

Once a month, Wildwood Smokehouse and Saloon shakes up its usual country style, trading in line dancing for salsa night. Cost: \$5.

### Iowa Indoor Rowing Challenge

Feb. 7, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.



UI Field House, 225 S. Grand Ave., Iowa City

Masters, open and junior rowing events in 2k, 1k and 500-meter distances will be held. Get a team together to compete in the Team Relay, and show your strength in

the Super Rower Challenge. Cost: \$22. Breakfast will be provided. To register, visit <http://events.uiowa.edu>.

### Kronos Quartet - Beyond Zero: 1914-1918

Feb. 7, 7:30 p.m.

The Englert Theatre, 221 E. Washington St., Iowa City

The Kronos Quartet will perform a new multimedia work, composed by Aleksandra Vrebalov with a film by Bill Morrison, commemorating the centennial of the outbreak of World War I. The program will also include a new work by Mary Kouyoumdjian. Tickets: \$10-\$37, through <http://hancher.uiowa.edu>.

### Chris Yon and Taryn Griggs

Feb. 7, 8-10 p.m.

CSPS Hall, 1103 Third St. SE, Cedar Rapids

Minneapolis-based dance couple Chris Yon and

Taryn Griggs brings monochromatic costumes and a soundtrack consisting of pop music, noise and a lesson in touch typing for the Iowa premiere of "The Very Unlikelihood (I'm Going to KILL You!)." Tickets: \$15 in advance, \$18 at the door. To purchase tickets, visit <http://legionarts.org>.



### Bald Eagle Watch & Expo

Feb. 8, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

North Central Junior High, 180 Forevergreen Road, North Liberty

Members of the public are invited to this indoor expo dedicated to our national symbol. Speakers will include Iowa author and wildlife photographer Ty Smede and Luke Hart, from the Macbride Raptor Project. Once you're done inside, visit Coralville Lake and view eagles in action. Free.

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