

Alabama fights fat, media with new screening program

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Alabama's effort to expand its health screening program has taken over the Web recently. And while most outlets pounced on the "fees for fat" angle, the program's steward says the media frenzy got it all wrong.

The program, as described by MSNBC and others, would charge state workers \$25 a month for their health insurance if they do not undergo a free health screening by January 2010. If the screening reveals some type of health problem the worker has a year to take action -- see a doctor, join a wellness program or get fitter on their own -- or else they'll be on the hook for the \$25 monthly charge.

MSNBC put it thusly, "[Alabama workers to pay for extra pounds](#)" The AP said, "[Extra pounds mean insurance fees for Ala.](#)" And the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* said, "[Extra pounds may be costly for Alabama workers.](#)"

Nevertheless, William Ashmore, executive director of Alabama's State Employees' Insurance Board, says the reports got it wrong. The state has been screening workers for 15 years and finds that 10% to 15% of at-risk employees are completely unaware of their health threat. The goal, he says, is to make sure everyone gets screened.

"It's not a surcharge, it's a premium discount," Ashmore says. Hear the rest of what Ashmore has to say online at [EBA's Raw Bar](#).

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