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**The Plight of the Disabled in Finance**

The recent change in healthcare has many economists, journalists and government officials worried about the future of the U.S economy. With the new Affordable Healthcare Act now in effect, predictive economic models are not showing positive results for the future. Costs for businesses are estimated to increase, and, in turn, lead to decreasing profit and investment. The decreasing investment along with a lowering of consumer confidence in the market and the government leads economists to predict an economic tailspin that will negatively affect not only the general population but also the disabled population in a number of industries. Indeed, the Affordable Healthcare Act will cause sufferers of Asperger’s Syndrome in particular, which is the most functioning form of Autism, to face greater hardships than ever before in the financial industry.

To understand these hardships, it is first imperative to fully understand how President Obama’s new healthcare reform works. The purpose of the Affordable Healthcare Act, or the ACA, is to make healthcare available to all Americans. The ACA is also supposed to make the cost of healthcare cheaper for everyone through subsidized cost of making employers supply healthcare options to all employees. Many CEOs disapprove of the ACA due to the increased costs for businesses. To change opinions and combat the negative views, tax deductions have been put in place by the government for small businesses; however, the same incentives are not available to large companies.

It is equally important to understand the government’s rationale for the program as well as the financial risks involved. Executives from the White House say there is a “desire to slow healthcare cost growth,” (Whitehouse.org). This means that the funding of benefit programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security now need to come from another outlet. Such benefit programs used 43% ($1.5 trillion) of the government budget in 2012 (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities). According to Matt Nesvisky from the National Bureau of Economic Research, Medicare counts for about 2% of U.S Gross Domestic Product, or GDP. GDP is essentially what an economy supplies based on market demand. The 2% of GDP shows the government is spending a lot of money on producing for its citizens, but its citizens and foreign countries aren’t spending a lot of their money back in the U.S economy. This high spending, low return problem is called economic inefficiency. The government needs to fix this problem or this will be one of the reasons for the tanking of the economy. Indeed, if the economy does tank, layoffs will be imminent, especially for the disabled population, unemployment percentages will skyrocket, and U.S citizens will continue to face the hardships they have faced over the last five years during the recession.

Besides changing income, job security and government spending for benefits programs, The ACA has other direct and indirect impacts. For business owners, the hit is direct, costing them more money due to raised taxes, for larger companies, and the cost of supplying health insurance options to employees. The ACA affects employees indirectly because employers will cut staff to minimize costs and maximize profits. Many economists contrast opinions on the occupancy of the job market in the future. Casey B Mulligan, of the University of Chicago, discusses in his New York Times article “*Health Care Inflation and the Arithmetic of Labor Taxes*” the downside of the ACA in regards to taxes, costs and full outlook on employment, full time and part time. He says that we can predict the ACA overall will contract the 2015 labor market by about three percent. Therefore, less money circulates the economy leading to less investment and consumer spending. This low investment was one key reason as to why the recession of 2008 has lasted as long as it has. Since the finance industry is the first industry to see the effects in economic change, the hardships of the poor economic state will affect them faster and thus harder since it comes with no warning. This change will lead to additional challenges such as decreased hours, reduced pay, or even layoffs for able-bodied and disabled employees

In general, the ACA affects the disabled population, which includes those suffering with Asperger’s, both positively and negatively. If someone with a disability didn’t have healthcare in the past due to discrimination, they most likely now have at least the most basic health insurance coverage. Ari Ne’eman, President of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network and a member of President Obama’s National Council on Disability, says this is an improvement to current standards, though some people will still fall through the cracks of requirements for healthcare coverage. He also says “healthcare and employment have always been interrelated.” Keeping a job is an even more important factor now. If people were able to afford high quality healthcare; however, they lose their job and no longer can pay premiums, they will lose their healthcare coverage and be moved to a lower quality healthcare plan. The disabled population is a group that heavily relies on the healthcare system due to their continuous need for medication and medical attention and treatment thus proving these changes can do more harm than good.

So how will Asperger syndrome sufferers suffer the worst impacts in the financial world? Asperger’s Syndrome, as previously mentioned, is the highest functioning form of Autism. People with this syndrome typically are exceptionally skilled in one particular area, most commonly in music or math (WebMD). Being a savant in math is a main reason why many people with this syndrome find employment in the financial world. Though they may lead to great discoveries with their mathematical gifts, they still experience some social awkwardness, communication difficulties, and limited interest in other areas. Often, employers look past these difficulties, and focus on the positives that these people bring to their company; however, now with limited employees due to high costs of the ACA, employers may start to shift focus on the negatives, leading to a downsize in the number of people with this disability that are hired. Roughly one in 88 people have a form of Autism, and though not all of them are in the workforce, a good number of Autism sufferers could become unemployed.

A closer look at the financial industry as a whole is needed to understand these effects further. Currently, there is low consumer confidence in the economy, which means that the population has no trust in the market and the government protection of its money. If this continues, people will continue to not risk investing in stocks, bonds, currency or other financial markets. According to economist Karen Campbell of the Heritage Foundation, the healthcare change will increase the U.S deficit by an average of $75 billion per year. As a result, the nation’s publicly held debt will be $753 billion higher at the end of 2020. This problem causes greater stress on the people who work on Wall Street or in finance to keep current standards of trading and money flow through the economy. Employees now have extra pressure to maintain or increase commissions and profit if they want to keep their jobs. When starting a job in this field, it is not uncommon to work 70 to 80 hours per week, not including commuting time spent on subways and trains, which is a given for many in the finance industry who work on Wall Street or in other urban areas. Over time these hours tend to lessen; however, due to foreign markets opening and closing at different times during the day, work hours still tend to be very high for many people. This can take a toll on their health and increase their chances of getting sick or having to go to doctors. If people lose their jobs, or don’t have the money to pay for their medical expenses, government and economic problems will only get worse. Though the ACA covers many medical costs, co-pays and medication still cost people money, and after a while the bills will add up.

Unfortunately, there is a very limited supply of information and resources on how the healthcare reform will affect the disabled population. To fully understand the overall long-term impact of the ACA, individual groups of people with disabilities should be surveyed. Another idea is to move small amounts of people with disabilities to the ACA healthcare plans in a given period of time to see the affects before everyone is covered. Though it is slow, the current plan of having people sign up on their own daily should be changed. The government should limit the amount of people that can change plans within a certain period of time to allow amendments to be made to the policy, if need be, to best affect the general population and more specifically the people with disabilities.

Overall, the ACA is going to negatively impact everyone, but the worst affects will be felt on the disabled population, and more specifically, those with Asperger’s Syndrome. Most of the data, for the general population, supports the claim that jobs will be lost, insurance coverage’s will most likely change, and people won’t have as much money to support themselves and their families. If these predictions are correct, the economy is sure to spiral down, causing more problems in the future, especially for people who already have had setbacks.

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