



Lawmakers, medical experts lobby for extensive Medicaid funds

Posted: Tuesday, February 19, 2013 7:06 pm | Updated: 12:05 am, Wed Feb 20, 2013.

By WES BURDEN 419-993-2150 info@limanews.com

LIMA — Ohio must follow Gov. John Kasich's proposal to extend Medicaid coverage and accept new federal funds, officials agreed Tuesday during a meeting at Health Partners of Western Ohio.

Presenting its arguments to those who advocate for greater Medicaid expansion to Ohio's safety net, leaders throughout the state explained how accepting Medicaid funds from the federal government will lead to an increase in local and statewide jobs, will reduce the burden of increased premiums for those with private insurance and will provide care to those who couldn't afford it or need more help than they already receive.

The cost of Medicaid expansion is a key issue in the present and future. Opponents of new Medicaid expansion argue hospitals in the future will lose 17 cents per dollar spent on Medicaid patients, losses that become erased through cost-shifting or driving up the premiums for people with private insurance.

Dr. Lynn Thompson, chief medical officer at Lima Memorial Health System, said he was confident these shifts of increased payments will not follow the Medicaid expansion.

“From a hospital perspective, we fully support the extension of Medicaid in the state of Ohio,” Thompson said. “The funds from the government will allow the hospital to reduce costs of uncompensated care by over \$2 million and release the burden from those with private insurance.”

Since making the announcement he will allow the federal government to allocate funds to Ohio's Medicaid coverage, Kasich argued if federal tax dollars from across the country pay for Medicaid expansion, then Ohio should be recipient of those funds from the government.

Tracy Plouck, director of the Department of Mental Health, said Ohioans are already paying into the program, so that serves as an incentive to accept this offer.

"People should realize that we are paying tax dollars into the program no matter what," Plouck said. "It makes sense that we should accept this federal aid, while reducing the costs to local hospitals and in the long run being able to create new jobs with money saved from our state budget."

Another lasting issue is making sure those who can't afford private insurance are given a chance to be provided basic Medicaid care. Mike Schoenhofer, executive director of the Allen, Hardin and Auglaize County Mental Health Recovery Services Board, said he believed people are beginning to recognize Medicaid isn't just a poor people system but more a safety valve for those in need.

"I know many people here from different fields, from executives at banks to CEOs of health companies who recognize why this decision is vital for our state of Ohio," Schoenhofer said. "There are many people with drug or alcohol problems who we couldn't afford to care for because of budget and financial issues who will stay at risk if we don't extend Medicaid funds and help those who need it."

The incentive to accept funds is something Ohio can't refuse. According to recent studies, the state of Ohio is on tap to receive \$2 billion the first year, and through 2020 the state will receive nearly \$13 billion to help fund new Medicaid budget plans. One area funds will be needed is hospital emergency rooms, where unpaid care cost hospitals more than \$1.2 billion in 2012.

These costs are paid by the federal "disproportionate share hospital," a program which serves hospitals that treat an unbalanced number of low-income patients. With rollbacks on DSH subsidies due in 2014, hospitals face a dilemma only extended Medicaid funds will be able to reconcile. These funds will provide hospitals with the relief of not extending extra costs to those with private insurance, will ensure hospitals receive payment for services they provide and protect rural and safety net hospitals from closing.

The argument over whether or not Kasich should allow the state to accept more federal funds and expand Medicaid is a battle that will continue for months. Arguments from both sides will continue to rage about the positive and negative impact accepting more federal funds will have on our state and national economy.

Mary Williamson, a board member at Health Partners of Western Ohio, said she believed being able to provide for those who can't afford basic health care is a necessity in our area.

"I don't know everything about Kasich's new budget or proposals," Williamson said. "What I do know is more Ohioans who don't have health care coverage should be able to and not have to worry about it anymore."

© 2013 LimaOhio.com

http://www.limaohio.com/news/local_news/article_63544b16-7af1-11e2-80b7-0019bb30f31a.html