



Medicaid expansion is a winner: David T. Matia



By [Plain Dealer guest columnist](#)

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Ohio's General Assembly must recognize the tremendous opportunity [Medicaid expansion](#) provides for Ohio. Expanding Medicaid eligibility under the Affordable Care Act will result in a healthier, safer and more law-abiding Ohio with little or no cost to Ohioans.

Not often considered is that expansion of Medicaid eligibility has the potential to be a "game changer" in the criminal justice system. The majority of defendants appearing in Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court suffer from mental illness, drug dependency or both. Expansion of Medicaid eligibility would provide health care to those previously uninsured individuals most likely to end up in the criminal justice system. Providing health care to those most at risk would divert many potential defendants from our courts and Ohio's prison system. An individual being treated for mental illness or drug dependency is less likely to commit a criminal act.

Not only would the health care provided under Medicaid expansion benefit several hundred thousand previously uninsured Ohioans, but risks to our safety forces would decrease. One of the more troubling cases I handled involves that of a paranoid schizophrenic, Anthony Roden. Mr. Roden's mental illness was untreated in 1974 when Cleveland Police Officer William Shapiro found him shooting at passing cars near the Baldwin Water Treatment Facility. Roden, deep in the clutches of his mental illness, shot and killed Officer Shapiro as he was dutifully attempting to protect the public.

Shapiro's children grew up without a father, and Roden has been in a mental care treatment facility by court order since this preventable and tragic April 1974 day. Had Roden received basic medical care, this tragedy would never have occurred. Officer Shapiro's death as a result of an encounter with a person with untreated mental illness is, unfortunately, an all-too-common experience for those in our safety forces. Expanding Medicaid will provide health care to many mentally ill and substance-dependent individuals. Providing this population with basic health care will lower the risk to Officer Shapiro's son, David, currently a Cleveland police officer, and other safety force members like him.

Additionally, expanding Medicaid in Ohio would greatly benefit our local economy. Hospitals spend millions of dollars annually providing uncompensated care to the uninsured. Expanding Medicaid would decrease uncompensated care. A [study](#) by the Health Policy Institute of Ohio and Ohio State University revealed that Ohio would benefit economically from expansion by having the federal government pay a much higher share of state Medicaid costs, resulting in a net savings to the state. In the first few years of Medicaid expansion, every new dollar Ohio spends would be reimbursed at 100 percent. That reimbursement rate would gradually decrease to 90 percent over the next several years.

Ohio is being offered a choice to contribute a very small amount of an at-risk population's health care costs to better those individuals' health and safeguard all of us from drug- and mental-illness driven crime. Expanding Medicaid is an opportunity that Ohio cannot afford to pass up.

David T. Matia runs Cuyahoga County's Drug Court and has been a Cuyahoga County Common Pleas judge for 14 years.

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