

## Hughes: Medicaid expansion brings care and jobs

By Frank Lewis | PDT Staff Writer | Friday, February 22, 2013



Ed Hughes, Executive Director of The Counseling Center says Gov. John Kasich's proposal to increase Medicaid coverage in Ohio brings with it three positive features.

"We want to help the sick people in our community," Hughes said. "But we also want to help them before they get real sick, so being able to reach them earlier will lower costs of health care. Then, I think the job creation that will come with this, because of the people that we will

be able to treat, where we struggle to do that now, is going to be really significant in terms of our poor community as far as jobs."

Gov. John Kasich says extending Medicaid coverage to thousands of low-income residents will help the state on multiple levels. The Republican governor proposed Medicaid expansion under the federal law in his two-year budget plan. He's framed the decision as recapturing Ohio taxpayers' federal money. The state would see \$2.4 billion from Washington to cover those newly eligible for Medicaid over the next two years beginning in July.

"From The Counseling Center's standpoint, it essentially creates an opportunity for people who do not have access to drug, alcohol, or mental health services, to have that access through their medical card," Hughes said. "So it's giving health care coverage to people."

Hughes said one of the biggest problems health care professionals have in trying to help people in this region is the fact that many people do not have medical coverage.

"So being able to give them the amount of treatment or services or health care that they need, is just not possible," Hughes said. "Some of the folks who are most sick as the result of their addiction or their diabetes, or mental health issue or their hypertension, they are just getting sicker every day."

Hughes said people who can't get care for their conditions will eventually end up in the emergency room with a chronic condition brought on by a lack of care.

"When that happens, that care will all be unpaid, which means all of those costs get passed on to other people," Hughes said. "That's been the unbalance - those people with health care coverage have been paying for those who do not have it, which then elevates the cost of their health insurance."

Hughes said, by increasing Medicaid in Ohio, it will essentially balance that situation, but more importantly will allow people to get the preventative or early care they need to prevent the more expensive health care costs that come down the road, when illnesses go untreated.

Many Republicans are averse to President Barack Obama's signature health care law and resistant to expanding government programs. Kasich said in his State of the State speech Tuesday he knows the issue is controversial. But he says he's asking lawmakers to examine the issue carefully and examine their conscience. He says the most vulnerable shouldn't be ignored, but lifted.

"We moved to coordinate care. You know, four percent of Medicaid recipients drive over 50 percent of the cost," Kasich said in his State of the State address earlier in the week. "Their care was not coordinated. It didn't make much sense to them. And you know how complicated it is for all of us to be in a position to be able to understand health care and the ins and outs. We're now coordinating the health care of that 4 percent so their care is not just coordinated but logical and where they are healthier. And the whole country now is looking at our program."

Since between 10 and 20 percent of the people in Scioto County do not have access to health insurance, should those people who have been unable to get treatment, try again should Kasich's proposal pass?

"This is part of the budget package, and it has to be passed by the legislature, and if it passes the legislature, it becomes law," Hughes said. "And then in January of 2014 is when the timing of this would all play out, then, yes, they would be looking to become eligible, but also, providers, hospitals, primary care doctors, The Counseling Center, we ought to be helping those people get eligible as well. That would be a role that we would play - to explain their benefits to them. Our local (Ohio) Job and Family Services would play a huge role in that."

Hughes said another by-product of the expansion of Medicaid in the area is the expansion of jobs.

"This could be a huge jobs bill for our region," Hughes said. "Because all of these services, hospitals, doctors, primary care, emergency services, drug and alcohol treatment, we will all have to expand to meet this need, and that means jobs."

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