

More Medicaid helps everyone

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Ohio's Medicaid program is a safety net for thousands of families, children, low-income seniors and disabled people, but it's a safety net that requires ongoing, thoughtful reinvention.

The Feb. 22 op-ed column "System is broken, and state can't afford it, anyhow," by Seth Morgan, presented a misguided analysis that hospitals are the only winners with Gov. John Kasich's proposal for enhancing Medicaid eligibility.

Ohio is poised to take advantage of a momentous chance to continue reform of its Medicaid program by enhancing eligibility and providing health-care coverage to nearly 500,000 Ohioans who desperately need effective and appropriate care. A nonpartisan study released in January revealed that Ohio stands to save \$1.4 billion and create more than 30,000 jobs over the next decade by expanding Medicaid eligibility as proposed in the governor's budget.

The study highlights that reducing the number of uninsured in this way would result in more people working, thereby stimulating the economy by bringing counties more sales-tax revenue and reducing costs to employers. Ohio organizations including the Cleveland Partnership, Ohio State Medical Association, Columbus Chamber, Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, Bishops and Assisting Bishops of the Dioceses of Ohio and Southern Ohio, LeadingAge Ohio and Ohio Right to Life have recognized that modernizing Medicaid will directly improve Ohio's health-care system.

From 2014 through 2016, any expansion of Ohio's Medicaid program would be covered entirely by federal funds, meaning newly eligible Ohioans under an expansion could be insured without additional state dollars. In fact, rather than increase deficit spending, Congress imposed cuts to other hospital programs to offset the cost of such a large share of federal support. Ohio also has a chance to build a more-flexible Medicaid program, with greater opportunities for personal responsibility, less cost-shifting onto privately insured families and employers and less financial risk for the state.

Every day, Ohio hospitals provide health-care services to all who enter their doors, including those who are unable to pay. The costs of providing health care for Ohio's 1.5 million uninsured citizens are borne today by Ohio's hospitals, employers and 10 million other residents. Foregoing the enhancement option altogether would dismiss a unique opportunity to streamline and simplify Medicaid eligibility, promote long-term stability of the state's finances and create more rational incentives in the health-care delivery system.

Hospitals recognize that enhancing and streamlining the Medicaid program will present challenges, but this opportunity will help address challenges faced by families without health insurance and the resulting unsustainable impact on Ohio's economy and health-care delivery system.

On behalf of all Ohioans, the Ohio Hospital Association looks forward to working with the General Assembly and government leaders to achieve a better health-care system for our state.

MIKE ABRAMS

President and CEO

Ohio Hospital Association

Columbus

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