

Expanding health care is the right call for Ohio

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Recently, 1,000 people from greater Cleveland congregations listened to speakers argue for Ohio Medicaid expansion. / AP

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Shortly after he took office two years ago, Gov. John Kasich presented Ohioans with an innovative plan to reform Medicaid in Ohio. Tired of out-of-control costs and a stagnant, business-as-usual approach to health care, the governor introduced a plan founded on four core principles:

- Reduce the overwhelming costs by placing a much-needed focus on quality rather than volume.
- Improve long-term care across the state by creating more home- and community-based options for aging and disabled residents.
- Implement a more efficient, person-centered approach to care by connecting behavioral and physical health care needs.
- Improve care coordination for individuals by presenting them with a full continuum of health care services that lead to longer, healthier lives.

Ohio's innovation has received national recognition, and much of our work has even been replicated in other states. Ohio's Medicaid spending has been reined in, and expenditures for

the state's fiscal year 2013 are currently almost \$300 million under budget projections. Most importantly, the success that has come from innovation has placed Ohio in a position to provide a higher quality of care to more of its residents at a better value to taxpayers.

Gov. Kasich has rightfully chosen to expand health coverage to 275,000 uninsured residents who are living at or below 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In doing so, he reaffirms Ohio's position as a national leader in health care reform and takes another important step to ensure that our state's economy continues to support job creators with a healthy workforce.

In its June 2012 decision upholding the Affordable Care Act, the U.S. Supreme Court made it optional for states to extend health-insurance coverage through Medicaid to adults making \$15,415 or less per year, with the federal government paying 100 percent of the cost for three years before decreasing the rate to 90 percent in 2020 and beyond. States opting against expansion would see their residents' federal tax dollars be used to finance the health coverage of people in other states. If Ohio did not expand, the earnings of hard-working Ohioans would soon filter into the economies of other states rather than staying here at home.

(Page 2 of 2)

Ohioans work hard and should have the right to pursue secure and healthy lives for their families. Seventy-five percent of uninsured Ohioans work, but they lack the care and guidance that is available to workers with insurance.

By expanding health coverage to low-income Ohioans, we are looking out for those individuals as well as the small-business owners who would risk being penalized by the federal government if expansion does not occur. Under the new federal law, employers with 50 or more workers are subject to penalties if any full-time employees receive a premium subsidy for coverage through the newly created federal Health Insurance Exchange. Our plan prevents the federal government from posing a threat to the daily operations of these employers and the jobs that they offer.

Extending health coverage also protects working families and Ohio businesses from taking on the cost of otherwise uncompensated care. Without coverage, the uninsured often seek care through hospital emergency rooms and, when they can't pay, those costs shift onto private insurance. Expanding coverage will cut hospital losses almost in half and prevent more than \$1 billion in otherwise uncompensated care from driving up private health insurance premiums. Holding down private health insurance premium costs is good for Ohio's economy, and a good reason to keep Ohio's tax dollars within our borders.

Finally, quality and well-coordinated care leads to longer lives and better health outcomes in our communities. Covering more parents leads more children to receiving the care they need beginning at an early age. Increasing eligibility eases the financial burden felt by our county boards of mental health and addiction services as millions in county levy dollars become available for use on other priorities. More preventive care cuts back on the high costs associated with illnesses that if untreated now are more expensive and deadly later.

Gov. Kasich is committed to delivering real reforms that improve overall health system performance and steer the national health care discussion. Whether in the worlds of health care, business or education, the success of the past two years has been made possible only through bold and forward-thinking endeavors. Expanding health coverage is the right call at the right time for the state of Ohio.

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