



Medicaid supporters: Expansion would improve care, contain costs

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Written by

Russ Zimmer

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How old you are and whether you have children are two of the most important criteria for determining mental health treatment outcomes in Ohio. One way to remedy that, according to the head of one of Ohio's 53 behavioral health boards, is by expanding Medicaid to more residents.

One middle-aged man with a history of psychotic episodes and inpatient treatment cost \$70,000 to treat in 2012 alone, said Joe Trolian, executive director of the Richland County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board.

Because this patient has no kids and is not considered disabled, he doesn't qualify for Medicaid, so the entirety of the bill is picked up by local levy money.

The irony of the current system is that, after the treatment takes hold and helps this man become more stable, Trolian said, there won't be mental health services available to keep him from sliding backward.

Why? Because all of the locally raised money — about \$2.2 million — is tied up in treating people in crisis, as this patient was a short time ago.

“(Our) services are usually geared toward the most disabled, so we actually run into a problem where you might not be sick enough to get (help),” Trolian said.

Ohio is considering expanding Medicaid to cover everyone up to 138 percent of the federal poverty line. That would allow the Richland County board, and all other public behavioral health service providers, to use local tax dollars to intercede with preventive care before problems can fester.

Clients who go through the continuum of care lead more productive lives and are less dependent on the public, he said.

Trolan made the remarks on a conference call with editorial boards from the Media Network of Central Ohio. He was speaking on behalf of Ohio Medicaid Alliance, a broad coalition mostly made up of hospitals and health care organizations. The editorial boards plan to meet with opponents of the expansion next week.

Gov. John Kasich announced his support for the plan a little more than a month ago when he presented his budget proposal to the Ohio General Assembly, whose approval is needed.

Supporters tout the billions in additional federal spending that would come to Ohio, including the federal government paying 100 percent of the costs associated with newly eligible Medicaid enrollees for the first three years, then covering at least 90 percent of their costs after that.

Detractors say the country can't afford the expansion, and that eventually will lead federal officials to renege on that 90 percent floor and shift some of that burden back to the states.

Hospitals have been among the most vocal backers of Medicaid expansion. To help pay for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly referred to as Obamacare, hospitals are losing the payments they received for treating the uninsured.

Sky Gettys, chief financial officer at the Fairfield Medical Center in Lancaster, placed that number at \$1.5 billion during the next 10 years for Ohio hospitals.

Gettys said people at or near the poverty line — about \$23,000 per year for a family of four — aren't working at jobs that have employer-subsidized insurance.

People without insurance tend to use the emergency room, where they must be treated by law, in place of the doctor's office, where they can ask for payment upfront.

That's an expensive and inefficient way to deliver care, he said, and one that is ultimately borne by other consumers.

"Then (the emergency room visit) becomes care that doesn't get paid for because they don't have the money to pay for it, so that becomes a bad debt to the hospital," Gettys said. "You know, it's like any other cost. For the customers that don't pay you, that cost gets shifted to the customers that do."

razimmer@centralohio.com

740-328-8830 | Twitter: @RussZimmer

http://www.mansfieldnewsjournal.com/article/20130306/NEWS01/303060029/Medicaid-supporters-Expansion-would-improve-care-contain-costs?nclick_check=1