

Media Release

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Governor's Budget: a Great Start for Health Needs of Low-Income Utahns

Further Options to Contain Costs, and Restore Cost-Effective Access and Services Must Wait Until General Session

Salt Lake City-The Utah Medicaid Partnership (UMP), a coalition of advocates, providers, consumers, and concerned Utahns, commends Governor Herbert for his fiscal year 2011 budget and his effort to protect and improve Utah's Medicaid program.

Despite unprecedented demand for Medicaid assistance (enrollment is up nearly 50,000 since the beginning of the recession), the Governor's budget takes great pains to ensure access to critical care by restoring dental reimbursement rates and providing an additional year of funding for outpatient physical and occupational therapy for adults. All told, Medicaid will receive an additional \$36 million dollars under the Governor's proposal to cover enrollment growth, reimbursements to dental providers, and the service restorations.

"While some important services like dental care, eyeglasses, speech and audiology, and the disability waiting list are not included in the list of restorations, UMP believes that given the economic realities facing the state, the Governor's budget reflects a laudable commitment to safeguard access to critical health care for low income Utah families and people with disabilities," states Lincoln Nehring, an attorney with the Utah Health Policy Project and staff to UMP.

Dr. Jason Horgesheimer, UMP member and President of the Utah Academy of Pediatric Dentists, notes "we, as the Utah Academy of Pediatric Dentists, are grateful to Governor Herbert for hearing our concerns for providing care to the most vulnerable and underprivileged children in the state. His budget recommendation to restore dental pediatric provider rates will allow us to continue to serve this population and provide ongoing dental care. The Academy appreciates the Governor's attention to our concerns about the disproportionate cut that dentists serving children and pregnant women on Medicaid took last summer."

UMP members, Susan Duce, Pollie Price, and Heather Elwell, Presidents representing the TriAlliance of Therapies, including Utah Physical Therapy Association (UPTA), Utah Occupational Therapy Association (UOTA), and Utah Speech-Language Hearing Association (USHA) respectively are thrilled with the Governor's proposal to continue funding for physical and therapy services and ask the Legislature to build on the Governor's approach by restoring equally critical speech-language and audiology services.

"We would like to thank the Governor for restoring funding to Medicaid for occupational therapy and physical therapy. Despite the difficult economic times, this commitment of funds gives us confidence that Governor Herbert sees the importance of continuing to provide services to those in Utah who cannot afford it. In the future, we would hope that these funds can be on-going and again include speech-language pathology and audiology. As access to services improves, so does the likelihood that these individuals will return to the workforce and contribute to Utah's tax-based system," says Ewell.

UMP member, Joe Cramer, MD, observes “In times of need leaders must make very tough choices based on values not just political expedience. Adequate funding of Medicaid, Utah's means of caring for its most vulnerable, is one of those priorities that may not be easy but certainly it is something all conscience -driven leaders should honor.”

Through smart tax policy changes like requiring quarterly income tax payments by individuals and removing the vendor sales tax discount , the Governor’s budget makes responsible choices in ways that sustain Utah’s Medicaid program and protect our state’s low income families. UMP believes the Legislature now has an opportunity to build on the Governor’s efforts and to restore additional cost-effective services like dental care and audiology and continue to address Medicaid’s historically inadequate provider reimbursement rates. UMP has developed a set of principles to help legislators in this process. [The principles can be read here.](#)

“The health of low income Utahns, the health of Utah small business, and the health of Utah’s health care system demand that our Medicaid program be as efficient and provide the highest quality care possible,” states Nehring. “Governor Herbert’s budget is a great start toward meeting that charge; however, there are a number of cost containment and program improvements that the Legislature should explore to take the Governor’s efforts even further.”

The principles provide a roadmap to help maintain Utah’s Medicaid program and save taxpayer dollars over the long term. The state can contain costs *and* improve health status by expanding family planning services to more Utah families on Medicaid, strengthening Utah’s Preferred Drug List (PDL) by increasing the number of drug classes allowed on the program, and by enhancing Medicaid’s fraud prevention efforts. These changes alone can free millions of dollars that can be reinvested to restore critical services like dental care, vision, and audiology and make Medicaid better and more efficient.

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