

Utah Gets Visit from Federal Healthcare Officials

By [Andrea Smardon](#)

Link: <http://kuer.org/post/utah-gets-visit-federal-healthcare-officials>

Audio: http://cpa.ds.npr.org/kuer/audio/2014/02/HHSUTAH_web.mp3

Officials from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are in Utah this week on a two-day trip to talk with state lawmakers and advocates. The visit was ostensibly a chance for Utahns to meet the new regional director, but healthcare advocates say they also got a pep talk to sign more people up for insurance, and to continue pushing for a Medicaid expansion in the state.



Utah is the first stop on a six-state tour for Kim Gillan, the new HHS director for Region 8. Gillan came with Doyle Forrestal, the Executive officer for the region. They met today with healthcare advocates in a meeting that was closed to the media. But Jason Stevenson of Utah Health Policy Project gave a debrief.

“I think we learned that Utah is an important state in the rollout of the Affordable Care Act,” Stevenson says. “They’re reminding us that there are three million in Utah. There are hundreds of thousands of people who could benefit from the new insurance options available on healthcare.gov. And they wanted to thank the advocates and the people working on this issue, and give them a pep talk for these last eight weeks of the open enrollment period.”

Stevenson says advocates are basically conducting advertising campaigns to raise awareness and get people signed up for insurance before the end of March. Just over 18,600 signed up on healthcare.gov in 2013. Also discussed was Utah’s continuing indecision on whether to expand Medicaid in the state, and what to do about the part of the population that falls in a coverage gap – who don’t qualify for Medicaid, but also do not qualify for federal subsidies. Stevenson says HHS officials are pleased that Utah’s governor and lawmakers are working on a solution.

“They’re very glad that Utah is one of the states that is still talking about this, still figuring out what we can do to cover those 60,000 people in our state, and they say keep that up, because when people stop talking about this issue, it’s much harder to get it started again,” Stevenson says.

Gillan and Forrestal are scheduled to meet with various lawmakers, including a team of House Republicans in the House who are working to craft a solution to cover the poor and uninsured in Utah.