

# Consumer advocates say closing "coverage gap" good for Utah's economy

Troy Wilde / Utah News Connection

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SALT LAKE CITY - Consumer and health advocates say making sure all Utahans have access to affordable health coverage would benefit the state's economy.

The Utah Health Policy Project and Families USA released a [report](#) this week called Closing the Coverage Gap in Utah: Health Insurance for Working Individuals and Families.



It shows that about 90,000 people who don't currently qualify for Medicaid are employed in restaurants, retail, construction and other sectors.

"If you've got a healthy workforce, they're more productive and more reliable," says RyLee Curtis, Medicaid policy analyst at the Utah Health Policy Project. "If you're worrying about calling in sick all of the time, or you've got a bad bout of pneumonia, and you're uninsured, you're likely to miss more work."

Curtis is among those calling on Gov. Gary Herbert to call a special legislative session this year to consider expanding Medicaid.

She says providing Medicaid coverage for tens of thousands of Utah residents can be done without any added expense for taxpayers.

"The federal government will pay 100 percent of the expansion costs," she points out. "So, all of the newly eligible Utahns who would enroll on, say, the governor's Healthy Utah plan, the cost would be covered for them by the federal government."

Curtis says Herbert's proposed Healthy Utah Plan would address Medicaid expansion in a meaningful way.

However, she adds that the plan doesn't likely move forward unless the governor calls a special legislative session to vote on the matter.