

Utah Report: Working Individuals in Key Economic Sectors Would Be the Largest Group to Gain Access to Health Insurance

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Two-thirds—66 percent—of the Utahns who would benefit from closing the state’s coverage gap are working and are employed in occupations that most people rely on daily and are critical to the state’s economy, states a report released today by the Utah Health Policy Project (UHPP) and Families USA.



A teleconference for Utah media will be held on Wednesday, May 21, 2014, at 10 a.m. MDT (Noon EDT), to discuss the new Families USA report. See call details below.

The working Utahns are employed in industries ranging from food service workers and construction to the medical and retail sectors, and are employed as home health aides, child care workers, cashiers, clerks and janitors. Although these Utahns work in widely diverse jobs, they have one thing in common—they don’t make enough money to afford health coverage.

Another 18 percent who would be eligible for access to quality, affordable health care are adults termed “not in the workforce;” these are students, non-working spouses, people with disabilities, and people who have left the workforce. Together with the working Utahns, they make up about 84 percent of those Utahns who would gain access to health coverage.

Eligibility for Utah’s current Medicaid program sets an annual income ceiling of \$9,301 for parents with one child and denies assistance to most families without dependent children, regardless of how low their income may be. (A limited number of non-disabled adults both with and without children have access to very basic coverage through Utah’s Primary Care Network). Affordable health insurance could be extended to residents with incomes up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level, which is \$27,310 for a family of three in 2014.

Of the tens of thousands of Utah residents who are uninsured and would qualify for coverage, 66 percent, or almost 92,000, are employed as follows:

- 12,898 people employed as food service workers in such jobs as fast food workers, cooks and waitresses.
- 12,543 in sales, working as cashiers, retail salespeople, and travel agents.
- 11,338 in office and administrative support jobs like hotel desk clerk, office clerk, or messenger.
- 9,660 in construction jobs—carpenters, painters, laborers, and more.
- 8,631 in cleaning and maintenance, including housekeepers, janitors and landscapers.
- 7,177 in production, including butchers, laundry workers and tailors.
- 6,295 in transportation jobs like bus drivers, taxi drivers and parking attendants.
- 4,848 in personal care, which includes barbers, child care workers and personal care aides.
- 3,763 in management.
- An additional 14,773 Utahns work in a variety of other jobs.

As the UHPP/Families USA report explains, the federal government currently pays 70 cents of every dollar spent on health care delivered through Medicaid, and the state pays the balance. Closing the coverage gap could benefit tens of thousands of residents, with the federal government paying all additional costs through 2016. After that, the federal share gradually falls to 90 cents on the dollar by 2020 and then stays at that level.

The report notes that if Utah had exercised its option to increase access to health care when the option was first available in January 2014, federal funds flowing into the state could have supported 2,264 new jobs and added roughly \$138 million to the gross state product.

“Utah should not delay any longer,” said Ron Pollack, Executive Director of Families USA. “The need to provide access to quality health coverage for tens of thousands of Utahns demands action. The state’s need for a good economic boost and new jobs demands it. And, of course, the fact that circumstances can make you virtually penniless and Utah will still deny you help to get basic health care really demands that the coverage gap be closed.

“The federal dollars to accomplish all this are on the table, waiting to be claimed,” Pollack said. Bipartisan governors across the nation have taken this important step, and it’s time for Utah to meet its obligation to its working families and provide them with access to health care.”

“This report shows us that Utah’s coverage gap not only impacts lives, but also the key occupations and industries that drive our economy,” said RyLee Curtis, Medicaid Policy Analyst at the Utah Health Policy Project. “Utah workers living without health insurance are one illness or one injury away from losing their job, their income, and their security. We have a Utah plan that closes the coverage gap and reclaims our own taxpayer dollars to be spent in our state, and we need to make it happen.”