

## Utah Department of Health representatives discuss governor's alternative to Medicaid expansion

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By Kelly Cannon

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Representatives from the Utah Department of Health met with local officials, medical providers, public health representatives and others Monday to discuss Gov. Gary Herbert's new Healthy Utah plan. The governor's plan would be an alternative to Medicaid expansion. Nate Checketts, health reform coordinator for the Utah Department of Health, explained that Healthy Utah would cover low-income, uninsured adults in Utah up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level using private market plans.



The governor announced the plan during the most recent legislative session but has hit a few roadblocks along the way. Herbert is currently working with the federal government to get approval for the plan, but the two parties disagree over whether people must be employed in order to qualify. If the federal government gives a green light, it will then be up to the Utah Legislature to approve the funding in either a special session or the next general session. Checketts met with local representatives and officials in a meeting closed to the media to walk through the what the process would look like.

“When these plans would open, (low-income individuals) would apply with the Department of Workforce Services. They would get approved for Healthy Utah, they would select a Healthy Utah plan, and Healthy Utah would help them pay for that plan,” Checketts said. “So they would get coverage like their neighbors on the marketplace, but it's something that they are not eligible for in their lives right now.”

The program includes several “individual responsibility” features, including requiring work effort or participation in employment training, charging premiums for higher-income adults, collecting co-payments from all adults and offering incentives for healthy behaviors. The plan will also support private markets by using employer-sponsored insurance when available and providing assistance to buy private market plans.



This new plan will benefit not only low-income individuals but also their children. “For the individuals already on Medicaid, they will continue to receive the coverage they do today. The one option that will be new to them will be if they have a child. If they do have children, we're going to give them the option that they can put their children on the same plan as the parents from the Utah Healthy plan,” Checketts said. “They'd still receive all of the Medicaid protections like no co-pays for children and things like that, but they'd be able to be on the same health insurance as their parents. So it's an option for them.”

In order to qualify for Healthy Utah, individuals must meet the basic requirements of traditional Medicaid, such as being a citizen or a legal resident and meeting income guidelines.

According to Bear Lake Community Health Centers, their North Logan center saw 5,155 patients last year. Out of that number, 2,142 were uninsured and 505 were Medicaid patients.