

Medicaid Vision and Dental Secures Funding for FY 2009

Feb 28, 2008 by Elizabeth Ziegler

(KCPW News) The Legislature approved funding Wednesday for vision and dental services for many low-income Utahns. The news thrilled Judi Hilman, executive director of the Utah Health Policy Project.

"We're excited to see that the dental coverage is taken care of at least for this year, that they're dipping into the Medicaid restricted account to cover that. That's good," Hilman says. "They've also agreed - finally - to use any money left over in Medicaid to cover vision services. So we're thrilled about that. We're just really excited. "

The Medicaid programs are funded with one-time money, and in lean years, they aren't funded at all. With the budget this year dipping below expectations, and a bleak economic forecast for the coming year, funding for the vision and dental Medicaid plans seemed to be in jeopardy. Executive Appropriations Committee co-chairman Senator Lyle Hillyard says the committee was able to find enough money in the restricted Medicaid account to cover the vision and dental plans this year. Next year, however, is less certain.

"I think all of us are concerned the revenues will not be as high next year. And that brings with it a corresponding challenge that if they are not as high, there may be more people in need of these funds," Hillyard says. "And it's a horns of a dilemma, as we say."

While she's pleased with the vision and dental funding, Hilman says the dental program only covers the elderly, blind and disabled, the same restriction that was in place last year. She says the Utah Health Policy Project will work again next year to extend full dental coverage to all Medicaid recipients.