

New Health Plan to Cover Uninsured Utahns

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[Cynthia Luu](#) - [November 13, 2014](#)

(Photo Courtesy of the Utah Health Policy Project)

Because Utah politicians voted against Medicaid expansion, the state lost a potential year in free funding in 2014.

Medicaid, a government program to help uninsured residents gain health care coverage, is voted on by individual state legislatures. If a state accepted the plan, 100 percent of the cost would be covered by the federal government for the first three years in 2014, 2015 and 2016. And if Medicaid continues to go unexpanded in Utah, an estimated 74,000 residents will be uninsured in two years, according to whitehouse.gov.



Gov. Gary Herbert has proposed his Healthy Utah Plan, an alternative to Medicaid expansion, to fill this gap. RyLee Curtis, a medical policy analyst at the Utah Health Policy Project, said the plan will increase access to health care coverage for those below 133 percent of the federal poverty level, which compares to a yearly income of under \$15,500 for a single adult. She said currently 45,000 Utah residents falling in this category could be served by Medicaid.

“These are Utahns who don’t qualify for subsidies for healthcare.gov, and they don’t qualify for Medicaid because they are not low income plus a category,” Curtis said. “Right now, those people are left with absolutely no options in health care.”

To receive Medicaid in Utah, individuals must meet the low income threshold with the addition of a standing category, such as a disability or pregnancy. With the governor’s plan, the amount of assistance will depend on four factors: ability to work, household income, access to employer or family health insurance and individual health care needs.

“Healthy Utah would benefit the low income workers of Utah, the backbone of our society,” Curtis said.

Currently, the Healthy Utah Plan is still in the early stages. Aimee Edwards, the spokesperson for Herbert's office, said a legislative committee will draft a bill for the plan later this week. Edwards said more concrete details for the plan will result from that bill.

c.luu@chronicle.utah.edu

@cynthia_luu