



Health Reform Task Force votes against governor's Healthy Utah Plan

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SALT LAKE CITY — The Utah Health Reform Task Force came together in a formal meeting Thursday at which members voted to not recommend Gov. Gary Herbert's proposed Healthy Utah Plan to the Legislature, opting instead to recommend two other options.

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Herbert officially [released the details of his proposed plan](#) at a press conference on Dec. 4, during which he said the proposed three-year pilot program would address the estimated 57,850 Utahns currently caught in the coverage gap created by the Affordable Care Act and the state's Medicaid limitations

According to Herbert's proposal, approximately 95,000 Utahns would be eligible for coverage under [the Healthy Utah Plan](#). It would also enroll individuals who are unemployed or underemployed in training programs to better build their resumé on the job market.

In Thursday's meeting, Task Force Co-Chair Rep. Jim Dunnigan gave a presentation to the task force, outlining three different options for consideration in expanding Utah's health care coverage. These three options included the Healthy Utah Plan along with two other options that concentrate on covering Utahns who are considered "medically vulnerable."

People could be considered medically vulnerable, Dunnigan said, if they have: a disabling mental disorder, a chronic substance abuse disorder, a serious or complex medical condition, are determined disabled under Social Security, are a child in foster care or a child eligible for federal assistance, or are in and out of the correctional system or emergency rooms.

Those against the plan said it would cost too much money

In the meeting, those who supported the Healthy Utah Plan spoke on how it is the most cost-effective option that would cover the most people, Jason Stevenson, communications director for the Utah Health Policy Project, said in an interview. Those against the plan said it would cost too much money, and a step-by-step approach would be better suited because it could be built upon as time passed.

In a close vote, it was decided that the task force would not recommend the governor's plan to the Legislature but would, instead, recommend the other two options for the medically vulnerable.

"This is a setback," Stevenson said, "but at the same time, the Healthy Utah Plan has a lot going for it in terms of support in the business community, from the hospital, as well as its underlying numbers that show it's the most efficient and cost-effective plan to close the coverage gap in Utah."

The two options chosen to receive the task force's recommendation for legislature only differ by how minimally or broadly the definition of "medically vulnerable" is taken.

In his presentation, Dunnigan said the first medically frail option would cover those who meet a minimum definition of medically vulnerable — or an estimated one out of every eight individuals who fall below 100 percent of the federally identified poverty level.

This has nothing to do with the Affordable Care Act

"We're calling this an extension," Dunnigan said. "This has nothing to do with the Affordable Care Act It would be perhaps a modification of our existing Medicaid waiver."

The second option would allow for a broader definition of medically vulnerable and cover approximately 1 out of every 5 individuals below 100 percent of the federally identified poverty level.

Even though the Healthy Utah Plan did not receive the task force's recommendation, Stevenson said he remains hopeful that the Legislature will still consider the plan in its upcoming session.

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