

Coalition of Health Organizations Urge Adoption of Healthy Utah

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By Bryan Schott
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A coalition of health advocacy organizations have joined forces to throw their support behind Gov. Gary Herbert's Healthy Utah plan.

The group, dubbed "Providing Utahns Smarter Healthcare" (PUSH), is urging lawmakers to put their partisan differences aside and approve Healthy Utah as the best option for providing healthcare to thousands of Utahns.

"Our organizations don't stand to gain from Healthy Utah, but we represent thousands of patients who will personally benefit," said Brooke Carlisle, Utah Government Relations Director for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. "Individuals who lack health insurance are less likely to get cancer screenings and will be diagnosed with cancer much later than those who have insurance."



So far, there are [two competing plans](#) for Medicaid expansion on the Hill this session - SB 164, sponsored by Sen. Brian Shiozawa, R-Salt Lake City, and SB 153, backed by Sen. Allen Christensen, R-North Ogden. Shiozawa's bill is basically Gov. Herbert's Healthy Utah plan while Christensen's proposal has been dubbed "frail Utah," as it only extends coverage to the most medically frail Utahns.

"We understand any effort to help an underserved population carries a big financial cost," said Marc Watterson, Utah Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association. "It can be tempting to go with the cheapest option. But, the cheapest option is not always the best option. We are asking legislators to remember there's a right way and a wrong way to do the right thing."

According to consensus numbers released by the Governor's office, the "frail Utah" option would cover approximately 16,000 Utahns over a six year period at a total cost to the state of approximately \$200 million. In turn, Christensen's proposal would bring back about \$611 million in federal money to Utah during that time period.

On the other hand, Healthy Utah would cover 136,000 Utahns at an estimated cost of \$236.7 million while bringing back \$3.2 billion in federal money to the state.

"This is a delicate issue," says Dr. Kyle Jones from the University of Utah Hospital. "If lawmakers fail to pass this (Healthy Utah), multiple hospitals and clinics will close down, especially in rural areas. Polls show people support Healthy Utah."

Watterson adds this issue is not one that should be decided by politics.

"Healthcare crises do not know political boundaries. This is not about counting political victories. The only winners and losers out of this are the people of Utah."

The groups that make up the PUSH coalition include the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, the American Diabetes Association, the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association, the American Stroke Association and the Susan G. Komen Foundation, Utah.