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## Colorado Lawmakers Share Medicaid Expansion Tips With Utah

By Brenna Kelly

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It's been eleven weeks since Gov. Gary Herbert's Healthy Utah bill died in committee, leaving 53,000 adults and their families without health insurance. As lawmakers continue to work toward a solution, they will be taking a few tips from a neighboring state.

In January of 2014, Colorado legislators expanded Medicaid, and within six months over 200,000 newly eligible adults signed up for coverage. On Thursday, May 21, a bipartisan group of Colorado lawmakers will attend a panel discussion in Salt Lake City called "Doing the Math: How Smart States are saving Lives and Money by Closing Coverage Gaps."



Sen. Irene Aguilar represents Denver in the Colorado Legislature. She drew some similarities between Utah and Colorado.

"I think that both states, in my view, have a focus on having a healthy state, and then delivering cost-effective care," she said. "I think the fact that (Utah has) a great infrastructure focused already on controlling health care costs and increasing the effectiveness of (its) case is something that we share in common."

Colorado legislators managed to expand Medicaid without spending any General Fund dollars, which come from state taxes. As part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the federal government does what's called dollar-matching – for the first three years of expansion, the government will cover 100 percent of the health care costs in Colorado. That's why their Department of Health Care Policy and Financing is operating on an \$8 billion budget, 80 percent of which comes from the federal government and goes toward Medicaid.

The Utah Department of Health, on the other hand, is financed by state taxes and spends about \$3 billion – over 80 percent of which also goes toward Medicaid.

Aguilar says the primary concern of opponents to Medicaid expansion has been that the federal government may not continue in its commitment to finance 90 percent of states' Medicaid costs after the three-year period.

"I think, for the first three years of expansion, because it is 100 percent federally funded, it really is very low-risk for states to expand Medicaid," Aguilar said.