

New analysis points to governor's health plan as best deal

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SALT LAKE CITY — A new analysis of Medicaid expansion proposals released Tuesday morning comparing Gov. Gary Herbert's Healthy Utah plan with the more limited House alternative, Utah Cares, shows the governor's plan appears to be the better deal.

"Healthy Utah has six times more value per dollar than Utah Cares — it also costs much less and has lower risk," according to a report from AARP Utah, Utah Voices for Children and the Utah Health Policy Project.

Healthy Utah, which would qualify for the largest federal match available by providing coverage to residents earning below 138 percent of the federal poverty level, would bring \$912 million to the state over two years and cost \$37 million.

In contrast, because Utah Cares would take care of fewer low-income residents, the state would have to pick up 30 percent of the cost, \$84 million, while receiving a smaller federal match, \$345 million, the report stated.

The two plans were compared with similar results during the 2015 Legislature, but the governor's plan stalled in the House. House leaders pushed their own plan, raising concerns about the sustainability of Herbert's proposal.

The governor responded by putting together a six-member group that included House and Senate leaders and charging them with coming up with a plan they could agree on by the end of July.

The group has already traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with administration officials about how the state can use the money available for Medicaid expansion under President Barack Obama's signature health care law.

None of the group's meetings have been public, but members have said they may need more time. The governor has said he will call a special session of the Legislature to consider the group's plan.

Until lawmakers take action on a plan, an estimated 66,000 Utahns remain in the so-called coverage gap because those earning below the federal poverty level do not qualify for any subsidies under the Affordable Care Act.

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