

Film tracks middle-class gap in Utah insurance coverage

KUTV (CBS-2)

By Cristina Flores

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Link: <http://kutv.com/news/local/film-tracks-the-middle-class-gap-in-utah-insurance-coverage>

Video: <http://kutv.com/news/local/film-tracks-the-middle-class-gap-in-utah-insurance-coverage>

Salt Lake City — (KUTV) They are only in their second year of medical school at the University of Utah but already Spencer Merrick, 28, and John Michael Sanchez, 22, are lobbying for the patients they hope to treat in the future. The pair produced a documentary film called "Donut Hole: Life in the Medicaid Coverage Gap."

The film will screen Tuesday, Sept. 1 at 7 p.m. at the Quinney College of Law on the University of Utah Campus. Admission is Free. For more information click betterutah.org/stillwaiting/.

The film is about the gap, or hole, that Utahns fall into when they can't afford health insurance (either privately or through the Affordable Care Act) and they don't qualify for Medicaid. Merrick and Sanchez want to help people understand the serious problem that is the Medicaid gap and to dispel myths about people who are suffering because of the lack of Medicaid help.

"The people who are in the gap are like everyone else. This is not a lower class problem. It's a middle class problem," said Merrick who stressed it's a myth that people who are on Medicaid abuse the system for years. Most recipients he said are on Medicaid temporarily -- for about a year -- while they get over a health hardship.

The Utahns featured in the documentary are people with debilitating health conditions that keeps them from working.

"How can someone be self-sufficient unless they are physically well?" asked Sanchez.

Both young men volunteer at free clinics and have seen the suffering of people who are in the gap or healthcare donut hole. They hope the Utah Legislature, which is currently discussing options to help people in the gap, can come up with a plan to close the gap quickly. They say the matter is an urgent social issue.

Merrick and Sanchez don't think it should be a difficult decision for state lawmakers to take federal dollars already on the table and expand Medicaid in Utah. The federal dollars (already

paid for by Utah taxpayers) could pay for 90 percent of the expansion while Utah would have to cover the remainder.

Both say expanding Medicaid makes economic sense because healthy people are working people. They also say it's the right thing to do.

"These people need help and it's our responsibility to help them," said Sanchez.

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