

State leaders talk about finding common ground on Medicaid expansion solution

ABC4 KTVX

By Glen Mills | gmills@good4utah.com

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Salt Lake City, Utah- (ABC 4 Utah) – State leaders said it won't go away and it isn't. Moving forward on Medicaid expansion was one of the main topics at an annual health care conference.

More than 50,000 Utahns fall into the Medicaid coverage gap and most of them have no option for health insurance.

"The problem is not going away, the problem is real, and we are not only losing hundreds of millions of dollars every year, but we are losing patient lives in the process," said State Senator, Brian Shiozawa, (R) Salt Lake City.

Shiozawa and Speaker of the House, Greg Hughes were part of a panel at the annual Utah Health Policy Project conference.

They talked about crossing the finish line after a handful of failed plans to cover the gap in Utah.

"I can tell you this, we're open to all options. I know there is a political will to help the most vulnerable and we need to get to that spot," said Hughes, (R) Draper.

The sticking point is money.

Hughes says the state doesn't have the luxury of deficit spending to pay for it, like the federal government does.

"That's where it was difficult for us to agree to a model where we were not confident the funding would arrive or that we could afford the portion the state would obligate itself for," said Hughes.

Shiozawa says there are responsible ways of meeting those concerns.

"Through money that would be generated from the Medicaid expansion itself, from hospital contributions that will defray that cost and in fact even show a positive balance for the state of Utah," said Shiozawa.

So, what will bring the two sides together? Hughes says to get approval from the House a plan will need to include partners who are committed to sharing the cost.

"It may not even be as robust as advertised by the federal government, but one we know we can deliver and provide for those that are truly in need," said Hughes.

The latest proposal, Utah Access+ did shift some of the cost to hospitals, doctors and other providers.

It failed, but Hughes says he still wants to work out some type of partnership with them.

The debate will continue when the General Session begins next month.

The first day is January 25, 2016.

