

Many Utahns still calling for full-scale Medicaid expansion

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The state has received more than 130 comments on its plan to extend Medicaid to fewer than 16,000 Utahns — and many of those commenters still are calling for full-scale expansion.

After years of debate and protests over Medicaid expansion, the state legislature this year **passed** — and the governor signed — a small-scale plan. Initially estimated to expand coverage to about 16,000 people, the current proposal would cover only about 9,000 to 11,000 of the poorest Utahns.

The plan targets childless adults who are chronically homeless, involved in the justice system or in need of mental-health or substance-abuse treatment.

It also expands coverage to low-income parents with dependent children previously not covered by Medicaid.

The state Department of Health ended its **public comment period** on the proposal Wednesday and received 134 written comments. Only 13 people testified at the **three public hearings** on the proposal held last month, in Salt Lake City and Logan.

Kolbi Young, a department spokeswoman, said officials now will review the comments for "common, emerging themes and then write a report responding to those themes." A report with an overview of the comments -- and responses to them -- will be available by June 24 and posted online.

Many of the comments supported full-scale expansion, Young said, adding that "more constructive" suggestions or questions about the current proposal "were in the minority."

Once the comments are processed, Young said, officials will meet to talk through any modifications to the proposal prior to submitting it the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for approval.

The department's goal is to submit the waiver to the feds by July 1, in the hopes of beginning enrollment Jan. 1, 2017.

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