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Florida to suffer most for not expanding Medicaid, studies show

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Of the two dozen states that rejected the Medicaid expansion, Florida will lose out on the most federal health care money for the poor, according to two nonprofit policy research groups that support the Affordable Care Act.

A joint report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Urban Institute projects that, over the next 10 years, the state will leave \$66.1 billion in Medicaid funding on the table by not approving the expansion included in the Affordable Care Act to cover individuals with income up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level.

That will mean more than 1 million uninsured state residents will not qualify for health care coverage, the report said.

Over the next decade, Florida's hospitals will miss out on \$22.6 billion in federal reimbursements, the report projected. During that 10-year time span, a combined \$423.6 billion in federal monies will not flow to the two dozen states that declined the expansion.

For individual states, Texas was second to Florida at \$65.6 billion.

The federal government is covering 100 percent of the costs of the Medicaid expansion for the first three years, with that percentage gradually declining until the states begin covering 10 percent in 2020 and beyond.

In response to a question, state Sen. Rob Bradley, R- Fleming Island, said concerns about the cost to the state and uncertainty about whether the federal government would stick to its funding pledge in the future and whether its cost projections would hold true were some reasons he opposed the expansion.

"There's always a concern when the federal government is involved," Bradley said. "You are concerned about the costs of the program exploding because they do not have a very good track record of controlling costs."

Bradley also said he felt traditional Medicaid has "serious flaws." He said his own family doctor does not take Medicaid patients because the program reimburses below the cost of care and does not reimburse providers in a "timely fashion."

Bradley noted that, in 2013, the Florida Senate pushed ahead with a "Florida plan" for Medicaid expansion monies, but it did not gain traction with the Florida House or the "inflexible" federal government. That plan would have included modest co-payments for participants and differing costs based on lifestyle choices, such as if a person smoked, Bradley said.

State Rep. Clovis Watson Jr., D- Alachua, said the state's high number of uninsured was, in his mind, a crisis, and moving forward with the Medicaid expansion was the "right and responsible" way to address it.

Watson said that, while some now see it as a "dead issue," he was confident

Democratic lawmakers will raise the issue again during the next session in Tallahassee.

“I am very much hopeful in the future we will accept these federal dollars to help our Floridians,” he said.

Dr. David Guzick, the senior vice president for health affairs at the University of Florida and the president of UF Health, said safety net hospitals such as UF Health Shands face a future where tens of millions of dollars in annual federal financial assistance to care for the uninsured go away. But the hospitals will continue to see a significant number of patients who have no coverage because the state did not expand Medicaid, Guzick said.

“That’s our double whammy situation,” he said.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has granted Florida a one-year waiver for its safety net hospitals to continue receiving funding to assist with the costs of providing uncompensated care to the uninsured. But this is expected to be the last year for that funding, which the federal government plans to phase out because the Affordable Care Act and the Medicaid expansion were intended to increase the numbers of people with coverage.

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