



March 14, 2019

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Idaho Physicians Urge Legislature to Implement Unmodified Medicaid Expansion

BOISE, ID – In a Statehouse press conference today, Idaho physicians called on the Legislature to implement unmodified Medicaid expansion as passed by 61% of the voters in November. Speakers included Ms. Tori Talbutt, fourth-year WWAMI program medical student, Dr. Julie Duncan, family medicine resident physician, and Dr. Jordan Urbanek, psychiatry resident physician. Marisse DeThomas, an Idaho resident living in the coverage gap, also spoke about the benefits of implementing Medicaid expansion without harmful barriers to coverage.

The physicians spoke about their patients who prioritize providing for their families over their own health needs due to lack of healthcare coverage. Because of chronic conditions, many Idahoans are forced to let their health decline to the point where they are unable to work. Providing healthcare to the 62,000 Idahoans living in the coverage gap would allow Idahoans to manage chronic conditions and continue working without forcing a choice between healthcare and food, rent, or other basic necessities.

“As my patients illustrate on a daily basis, health comes before employment and not the other way around,” said Dr. Julie Duncan. “Adding work-reporting requirements to Medicaid will only create a secondary gap, increase costs, increase bureaucracy, and weaken our economy. The patients I see work in jobs that don’t always fit into a box on a government form. The best way to incentivize work in Idaho is to make sure everyone has access to health coverage.”

In addition to providing care for Idaho citizens, Medicaid expansion will save state taxpayer money through the elimination of duplicative programs and services. However, recently proposed work-reporting requirements and other barriers to coverage will drive up administrative costs while denying Idahoans access to care. Implementing unmodified, streamlined Medicaid expansion is the only way to realize the full fiscal benefits of the program.

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“Many of my patients struggle to receive adequate care because of the obligations poverty imposes upon them; work reporting requirements would become yet another obligation,” said Dr. Jordan Urbanek. “Far too regularly my patients must cancel appointments, forced between purchasing food for their family or gas for their car. Prescriptions go unfilled, as the cost of medication is high, and purchasing medicine means not being able to pay rent. Medicaid expansion could help these people receive the healthcare they need. Then, rather than worrying about balancing their personal health against their most basic needs, they can continue to be contributing members of our community.”

“As an Idahoan living in the gap, I balance my job, raising two special needs children as a single parent, and maintaining my health without healthcare coverage,” said Marisse DeThomas. “Idahoans like me voted to expand Medicaid because we believe working families shouldn’t face bankruptcy in the event of a serious medical issue. Working parents, single parents, and caregivers have complex situations and should be spending time providing and caring for their families, not jumping through bureaucratic hoops just to get healthcare. Medicaid expansion must be implemented without harmful barriers to coverage.”

About Close the Gap Idaho: Close the Gap Idaho is a network of over 300 organizations and individuals statewide, working to support a complete solution to the coverage gap and to preserve health coverage for Idahoans. Close the Gap Idaho has led the effort to expand Medicaid in Idaho since 2014. A list of Close the Gap Idaho steering committee members can be found on the [Close the Gap Idaho website](#). Quotes from additional member organizations and Idahoans in the gap are shared below.

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