



OKLAHOMANS DECIDE HEALTHCARE

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Medicaid Expansion Supporters Announce Major Campaign to Put Healthcare on the Ballot

Doctors, nurses, and patients want voters to decide if Oklahoma should bring billions of tax dollars back to the state to provide healthcare to nearly 200,000 people.

OKLAHOMA CITY—Today, a growing coalition of Oklahoma doctors, nurses, patients, business executives, non-profit organizations, healthcare advocates and hospitals announced the launch of Oklahomans Decide Healthcare. The move kicks off the campaign to give voters a direct say on Medicaid expansion — an issue that has languished in the state legislature for nearly a decade.

The coalition, with a goal of providing greater access to healthcare for every Oklahoman, wants the state to bring more than a billion dollars back to Oklahoma every year from Washington, D.C., to expand Medicaid to nearly 200,000 Oklahomans and boost the state's economy.

"Rejecting available federal funds to cover the uninsured over the past decade has hurt families and increased health care costs. Things need to change," said Jay Johnson, president of Duncan Regional Hospital. "It doesn't make sense to send billions of our tax dollars to Washington, D.C., when we can keep that money right here in our community."

Oklahoma's decision not to expand Medicaid has hit rural Oklahoma particularly hard.

"Since 2016, eight hospitals have declared bankruptcy and six have closed their doors--all in rural Oklahoma." Patti Davis, president of the Oklahoma Hospital Association, said.

Many of Oklahoma's uninsured adults have jobs that don't come with health insurance — a challenge faced by a significant number of farmers, ranchers, and small business employees. They earn too much to qualify for existing Medicaid and too little to be able to afford care on the health insurance exchange.

"Hardworking Oklahomans whose jobs don't offer insurance should not have to lie awake at night wondering if they can afford life-saving care," said Erin Taylor, a proponent of Medicaid expansion and a disability advocate who has a 17-year-old son who receives insurance from Medicaid. Without it, she says her family would go bankrupt. "There are too many people out there who are having to choose between healthcare and putting food on the table."

Kelly Smalley, Sand Springs resident and full time care-giver to her disabled adult son, is one of those 200,000 Oklahomans who finds herself in the coverage gap and would benefit if the state expands Medicaid.



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“I worked full time and cared for my disabled son while he underwent multiple surgeries and hospitalizations related to a birth defect that left him unable to live independently,” She said. “But in recent years, I too, have been diagnosed with multiple illnesses and as a result I’ve had to cut back the amount of time I can work, which has left me without health insurance for myself.”

Smalley said being in the coverage gap means often times she has to decide between paying for a treatment for her disease, or affording housing and food for herself and her son.

“No family should have to face these sorts of decisions,” she added. “That’s why I was compelled to join this campaign. Too many families face a similar reality to ours and that’s not right.”

Dr. Jason Lepak a Tulsa physician, says by the time many patients without insurance seek help, their conditions have become incredibly costly to treat — costs that are often passed along to taxpayers and those who already have insurance. Medicaid expansion, he says, would provide a better way forward.

“This will help ensure that there’s hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans who have access to life-saving emergency care, it will keep rural hospitals open, and it will create thousands of jobs,” he said.

Under expansion, Medicaid is available to those making less than 133% of the federal poverty level, which is about \$17,000 a year for an individual or \$28,000 for a family of three.

Thirty-six states have already expanded Medicaid, and billions of tax dollars are already going to those states. Last year, voters in Utah, Nebraska, and Idaho all approved Medicaid expansion.

Oklahomans Decide Healthcare released a video today highlighting the benefits that Medicaid expansion would bring to Oklahomans’ health and the economy. The video is available on the campaign’s website: OklahomansDecide.org

A broadcast quality version of the video may be downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/31udZDp>

The campaign will need to collect nearly 178,000 signatures to put the issue on the November 2020 ballot.

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