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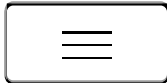


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New group pushes for Medicaid expansion

Posted: 4:34 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 5, 2014

BY [TIM EATON](#) - AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

More than 40 health and community groups launched a campaign Wednesday to raise awareness of the coverage gap created when Texas officials declined to expand Medicaid as part of the Affordable Care Act.

Advocating that poor Texans should have greater access to affordable health care, the group is gathering stories of people in Texas who fall into the so-called coverage gap.

The coverage gap is made up of the portion of the population that earns too much to qualify for Medicaid and too little to qualify for federal subsidies to buy health insurance at healthcare.gov, the federally operated website where consumers are supposed be able to buy and compare health plans.

Members of Texas Left Me Out include advocacy groups and health care providers such as the Center for

Public Policy Priorities, Foundation Communities and the Seton Healthcare Family.

“All of us know the people being left out of coverage; they are the working poor and we work with them every day,” Sister JT Dwyer of Seton Healthcare Family said. “It’s the veteran and his wife, the construction worker who helped build your neighborhood, the person that takes care of your child at the nursery and the health attendant that helps you care for your aging parents.”

Leaders of the the newly launched organization plan dispatch members to visit with legislators to persuade them to close the coverage gap and help insure the 1 million people in Texas who would have been eligible for Medicaid if Texas officials expanded coverage.

But because the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2012 that states couldn’t be required to expand the Medicaid, the state-federal program for the very poor and disabled, those people will they remain ineligible for Medicaid and won’t earn enough to qualify for subsidies to purchase marketplace coverage. Subsidies are available for consumers who earn between 100 percent and 400 percent of the federal poverty level. In 2013, the latest numbers, the poverty level was \$15,510 a year for a family of two.

John Davidson, a policy analyst with Texas Public Policy Foundation’s Center for Health Care Policy, took the opposition stance of Texas Left Me Out. Davidson, whose organization advocates for fiscally conservative causes, gave a few reasons why Medicaid shouldn’t be expanded in Texas.

For one, Medicaid patients already have the worst access to specialists. Relatively low reimbursement rates have led to specialists not accepting Medicaid patients, he said. Also, many people in the gap have the ability to work with doctors to pay for discounted procedures. Those people, if on Medicaid, wouldn’t have the opportunity to negotiate with physicians, Davidson said.

Tom Banning, CEO at Texas Academy of Family Physicians, said that the number of people willing and able to make deals with doctors is very small.

Davidson also said that Medicaid expansion wouldn’t have come with the any ability to fix the “problems in the current system.”

“Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act doesn’t contemplate any reforms,” he said. “It simply increases eligibility.”

Again, Banning saw it differently. All of health care organizations from medical societies and hospitals have said they wanted to expand – and reform – the system at the same time, he said.

Irma Aguilar, a 28-year-old mother of four from San Antonio, spoke at Wednesday’s press conference and told reporters and advocates for the poor that she falls into the coverage gap and it’s causing problems.

“Not having having health care coverage is an unfair challenge,” said Aguilar, an assistant manager at a Pizza

Hut franchise. “I have developed a major case of anxiety”

For her, lack of health insurance means performing the responsibilities of her job can be difficult due to her high-blood pressure and damaged disk in her neck.

“Texas left me out but I am here sharing my stories so we can change that,” she said.

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**BobbyRayTalbot**[Report](#)

I am appalled at the level of entitlement that is evident on the woman's face, in the photograph accompanying this story. If you are going to ask to be given something that is very expensive, in return for absolutely nothing, you ought, at the very least, to be humble and grateful when asking. I was taught as a child that if someone gave me something nice that they did not have to give me, I should be grateful and humble if I chose to accept it.

7:10 p.m. Feb. 5, 2014

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