

Nation

http://www.stltoday.com/news/national/st-louis-area-providers-aren-t-backing-the-gop-health/article_2539c184-6125-564d-8f50-3a96765e8638.html

St. Louis area providers aren't backing the GOP health care plan

By Samantha Liss St. Louis Post-Dispatch Mar 9, 2017

St. Louis area health care providers, policy and industry experts are not throwing their support behind the Republican health care plan working its way through Congress.

"There's not anything we really like," says Dave Dillon, spokesman for the [Missouri Hospital Association](#). MHA represents all of Missouri's 145 hospitals.

Dillon said the GOP plan would result in more uninsured individuals, leaving hospitals to care for patients without payment.

The American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association, and the AARP also have weighed in against the GOP plan.

[BJC HealthCare](#), the St. Louis area's largest health care provider and biggest employer, didn't say if they approve or disapprove of the GOP bill. They're still reviewing it. But spokeswoman June Fowler said any replacement for the Affordable Care Act "must retain access to coverage for those who in the past have been unable to afford health insurance."

On Thursday, the Brookings Institute released an analysis that shows at least 15 million people could lose insurance coverage by 2026 under the Republican health care plan, known as the American Health Care Act.

The GOP bill rolls back the requirement that most Americans have insurance. Under President Barack Obama's health care law, anyone who didn't have insurance faced financial penalties. Those fines disappear under the GOP plan. However, proponents of Obama's Affordable Care Act said the individual mandate was a tool to encourage young, healthy individuals to purchase insurance and balance out the risk pool of older, sicker consumers.

Another important element of the Affordable Care Act is providing financial help to consumers so they can afford insurance. Under the current law, the financial help was income-based. Generally, those who earned less qualified for more help.

Under the GOP plan, the help would be based on age and not income.

"While the ACA is not perfect, it's moved our nation forward in two critical ways. It has extended health care coverage to over 20 million people, many of whom are poor and vulnerable. In doing so, the ACA has shone a bright light on the moral problem of uninsured Americans while reducing their percentage to a historical low," [Michael Panicola](#), a senior vice president with Creve Coeur-based SSM Health, said in a statement.

Panicola said the current law also has moved the health care system to one where it's reimbursed for value and not volume.

"Any repair or replacement of the ACA must ensure that progress in these two critical areas continues," Panicola said.

[Sidney Watson](#), health law professor at St. Louis University School of Law, said the Republican bill would significantly change Medicaid, the government-run health insurance for the poor.

"It fundamentally changes the program," Watson said.

Right now, the federal government matches a certain percentage of the money states spend on Medicaid. Under the GOP plan, it would cap the amount of federal spending.

As health care costs grow or enrollment increases, “year by year there will be a growing shortfall,” Watson said. “States will be on the hook for the difference, and when they can’t come up with the money, seniors, people with disabilities and children are going to lose coverage.”

Samantha Liss

Samantha Liss is a reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.