

Group gathers to promote Medicaid expansion

By: Amber Duran, reporter amberd@cheadliner.com - Follow Amber on Twitter [@amberjeanduran](https://twitter.com/amberjeanduran) | Posted: Tuesday, April 28, 2015 2:45 pm

Nixa residents and area leaders rallied together April 21 in support of expanding Medicaid benefits in Missouri.

On a national level, Medicaid provides health coverage to nearly 60 million people including children, pregnant women, parents, seniors and individuals with disabilities, according to www.medicaid.gov. However, individual states set eligibility criteria within federal minimum standards. This is where the conversation in Missouri takes root.

Crystal Brigman Mahaney, the organizer of the April 21 press conference and a statewide grassroots organizer with Missouri Health Care for All, said in Missouri, a single mother of two can't qualify for Medicaid if she makes anything more than \$3,504 per year.

She said 300,000 Missourians fall into this Medicaid coverage gap, where they don't qualify for Medicaid or federal healthcare.

Mahaney wants to bridge that gap in Missouri, but she's not the only one.

Rev. Micki Pulleyking, interim minister at the Nixa Christian Church and a professor at Missouri State University, said Medicaid expansion is the miracle the Show-Me state needs.

"We need a healing miracle to happen for our state by expanding Medicaid," Pulleyking said. "We grieve the suffering caused by natural disasters and those we cannot control. How much more should we grieve suffering that we can control, caused by moral choices? Taking care of the health needs of our citizens is a moral choice."

Should Missouri choose to expand Medicaid, it would not be the first state to do so. There are 29 states that are expanding or have expanded Medicaid, and Jay Guffey, chief operating officer at Mercy Hospital Springfield, said Missouri can learn from these states.

"In Arkansas, for example, we have seen how Medicaid expansion has made it possible for tens of thousands of previously uninsured patients to have better access care," he said. "We support the



Medicaid expansion

Event organizer and a statewide grassroots organizer with Missouri Health Care for All Crystal Brigman Mahaney says expanding Medicaid in Missouri will save the state money in the long run.

effort in Missouri to find a way to expand coverage here.”

From a business perspective, Charlie O’Reilly, a Nixa resident of the O’Reilly Auto Parts family, said expanding Medicaid is the most economic decision.

“300,000 Missourians are in the coverage gap and unable to access basic care,” he said. “This is affecting our employers. It’s a smart business decision to expand Medicaid and keep our work force strong and productive.”

John Schmalzbauer, a Nixa resident who attended the press conference, said after the conference he is in support of Medicaid expansion in Missouri.

“It just seems like we’re putting people in impossible situations,” he said. “It’s not right.”

Missourians were encouraged to contact their local legislators to ask them to support Medicaid expansion.

Whether for or against Medicaid expansion, state legislators can be contacted as follows:

- Senate District 20, Sen. Jay Wasson (573) 751-1503; jay.wasson@senate.mo.gov.
- House District 138, Rep. Don Phillips (573) 751-3851; don.phillips@house.mo.gov
- House District 139, Rep. Jered Taylor (573) 751-3833; jered.taylor@house.mo.gov.
- House District 140, Rep. Lynn Morris (573) 751-2565; lynn.morris@house.mo.gov.

The last day of the Missouri Legislative session is May 15.