

# Letter: Medicaid expansion is crucial

Fred Hamburg 7:39 p.m. CDT August 27, 2016



(Photo: News-Leader)

A recent Billy Long article in the News-Leader was terrific. Designating and funding children's hospitals to treat complex conditions in children covered by Medicaid is a wonderful idea.

As a pediatrician, I saw the results of poor access to care every day in my office. Now if Missouri legislators would only understand that treating individuals preventatively, and for less serious conditions, would not only help countless children but would be tremendously fiscally responsible.

The Medicaid expansion would save Missouri an estimated \$47 million in the first year and \$348 million over ten years. Missourians pay taxes to support the Medicaid expansion but receive no benefit. Due to the legislature's stubbornness, the money goes to support the program in other states. So we in Missouri are paying to keep individuals in other states more healthy. Does this make sense to anyone? Do our legislators really not understand this simple math (even if they are not compelled to act for compassionate and moral reasons)? Do they really need to stick to the mantra of opposing social programs, even when this would generate a tens of millions of dollars a year surplus in the Missouri budget? These savings could also fund education programs, maintenance of roads and bridges and increase Medicaid payments to medical providers so they would be willing to see these patients.

Increased revenues to the state are only part of the total benefit from expanding this program. Due to the lack of funding and the lack of providers willing to accept limitless "no-pay" patients, these individuals have been shown to delay seeking medical attention, to utilize expensive emergency room services at a much higher rate and to receive hospital treatment far more often. These expensive costs are not underwritten in any way, so the hospitals must jack up the charges for all treatment, resulting in much higher insurance premiums for those of us who are insured. So we get to pay again. Make sense?

Hospital administrators are begging legislators to expand Medicaid. Many hospitals in states refusing to expand their Medicaid programs are going out of business. We just saw the closing of a Springfield hospital for this reason.

The United States is seeing a shameful increase in maternal mortality and premature births. We rank 31st of 32 countries reporting these statistics, better only than Mexico. And we brag about our medical system! As a doctor practicing in Springfield for 30 years, I know our medical system is terrific — but only for those who can afford it — and absolutely abysmal for those who can't. Our terrible maternal mortality is not due to poor hospital management — it is due to the prevalence of untreated chronic, damaging conditions in young mothers — conditions such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension and kidney disease, due to poor access to care.

Why isn't there an indignant outcry? How can we allow our legislators to be so thoughtless and uncaring? Are we proud of ourselves?

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