

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Medicaid expansion can stem the opioid crisis

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In this Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2018 photo Phillip Oliver, of New Bedford, Mass., right, in recovery from opioid addiction, speaks with chef and program director Jessica Asbun, of Brookline, Mass., left, in a culinary training program at the New England Center for Arts and Technology, in Boston. In Massachusetts, with Medicaid

expansion already paying for opioid addiction treatment, emergency money from Congress goes largely toward recovery services. The state has chosen to use its federal money for those in long term recovery to pay for things like housing, and job training. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

Health care matters to Missouri voters, and the opioid crisis cannot be ignored.

Attempts to repeal and sabotage health care and protections of the Affordable Care Act by both Congress and the Trump administration caused 128,000 Missourians to lose their health insurance in 2017. And of course, Missouri's uninsured rate is already higher than in other states because our state has not yet expanded Medicaid. About 12 million Americans have gained coverage under the expansion in 33 states. About 700,000 Missourians would gain access in Missouri.

In a bipartisan effort to target the U.S. opioid crisis, now more than ever is the time to expand Medicaid. Under Obamacare, Medicaid expansion is effective. It already covers addiction treatment for nearly everyone who is poor and needy, according to The Associated Press.

In effect, Medicaid expansion states had a running start on the opioid crisis, while states without the extra Medicaid funding play catch-up. Non-expansion states deal with more uninsured populations and are more likely to need addiction treatment coverage. In contrast, states with Medicaid expansion use the grants to create new infrastructure, asking providers to invest in new personnel, new systems and new ways of doing things.

Medicaid covers four out of 10 adults under age 65 with opioid addiction, more than all private insurance combined.

Next week, Idaho, Nebraska and Utah will decide whether their states should expand Medicaid. Montana voters will decide on maintaining that state's expansion.

The AP analysis found states that did not expand Medicaid spent \$2,645 per patient on opioid addiction treatment. Expansion states spent \$1,581 per patient for treatment. States that did not expand Medicaid spent \$1,170 per person served on recovery support services. Expansion states spent \$446 per person served on recovery.

Ed Shew • Lake Saint Louis



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Today's letters to the editor

