

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin: Why we need Medicaid expansion and why opponents are wrong

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Why We Need Medicaid Expansion and Why Opponents Are Wrong

By Andrea Kaminski

The co-chairs of the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee have announced plans to reject Governor Evers' proposal for Medicaid expansion in the biennial state budget. Their politically motivated decision would result in a loss to the state of \$324 million over two years, including needed general operating funds. Not accepting these federal tax dollars would gut much of what the Governor has proposed, including programs in the health, transportation and education budgets which serve all Wisconsin residents.

Here are five reasons why Wisconsin should accept the federal funding for Medicaid expansion:

More people will be covered by BadgerCare. The Governor's proposal would lift the income eligibility ceiling for a single individual from \$12,490/year to \$17,236/year, expanding BadgerCare eligibility to cover an additional 82,000 more adults.

Medicaid expansion leads to lower infant mortality. A new [study from Georgetown University](#) found that states that have expanded Medicaid saw a reduction in infant mortality from 5.9 to 5.6 deaths per 100,000 from 2014 to 2016, while infant mortality actually rose slightly in the 14 states that have not expanded Medicaid.

In addition to health coverage, Medicaid expansion will bring general operating funds into our state. It is a keystone in the Governor's budget which would yield a net savings for Wisconsin taxpayers of about \$324 million in the biennium. Without Medicaid expansion, there is much less money for not only BadgerCare, but also for many programs in the health, education and transportation budgets that serve all Wisconsin residents.

People all over the state will benefit. Recognizing that every Wisconsin county has unique needs, the state Department of Health Services has [analyzed what Medicaid expansion can do](#) for each county.

Medicaid expansion creates jobs and makes our state economy strong. More and better healthcare for Wisconsin residents means more jobs in the healthcare sector and a stronger, healthier workforce for the entire state.

Since the Medicaid expansion money became available to the states under the Affordable Care Act, Wisconsin has turned it down three times based on faulty reasoning. For example, opponents of Medicaid expansion claim it would cause private insurance rates to rise. That is a myth. The Wisconsin Office of the Commissioner of Insurance in early May released a [report by an independent actuarial firm](#) confirming that 2019 premiums on the individual health insurance market were 7 to 11 percent lower in states that expanded Medicaid than in states that did not.

Opponents of Medicaid expansion also claim the funding is not sustainable, and it might not be available at some time in the future. Maybe at first they said this because Republicans in Congress were actively trying to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Yet, despite [70 attempts](#) to do so, the ACA is still the law of the land. In the meantime, our state has repeatedly turned down the opportunity to accept the federal tax dollars available to our state. Wisconsin should accept the Medicaid expansion funds, just as it accepts federal funding for many other programs.

Despite the rhetoric by Joint Finance leadership, there is still ample opportunity for lawmakers to do the right thing in the budget process. They need to hear from their constituents that this is important. Joint Finance has yet to vote on its Medicaid recommendation, and that vote will be followed by amendments and voting by the full Senate and Assembly and then by the Governor's likely line-item vetoes.

While we have been paying into the federal Medicaid system through our federal

taxes, our leaders have refused to accept any of that money in return. It's high time for every lawmaker to rise above the political stunts and do what is best for the people of Wisconsin.

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Andrea Kaminski is Legislative Coordinator for the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, a nonpartisan political organization that advocates for informed and active participation in government. There are 20 local Leagues throughout Wisconsin. More information at lwvwi.org.

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Contact: Erin Grunze, Executive Director 608-256-0827; egrunze@lwvwi.org