

# Bill Kaplan: Doctors reaffirm expanding Medicaid

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Change is blowing in the wind. And, Wisconsin is another step closer to expanding Medicaid. In an extraordinary exchange, the Wisconsin Medical Society reaffirmed to me its support for expanding Medicaid. Doctors have been pivotal in all 40 states that have expanded Medicaid. Only 10 states, including Wisconsin, have not yet done so. However, Medicaid expansion is inevitable because of the fiscal, health and moral benefits.

I posed 2 questions to the Wisconsin Medical Society: Is the Wisconsin Medical Society doing anything to help individuals losing their coverage during Medicaid 'unwinding'? (With the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency, Wisconsin and all other states are now required by federal law to end continuous Medicaid enrollment. Medicaid enrollees must now apply for renewal to see if they are still eligible). Does the Wisconsin Medical Society support Medicaid expansion?

Mark Grapentine, JD, Wisconsin Medical Society Chief Policy and Advocacy Officer, appropriately responded first to my question about Medicaid expansion. (Without expanding health care coverage, options are limited during Medicaid unwinding). Grapentine said: "Our members care deeply about getting health care coverage to as many patients as possible one way or the other: affordable and comprehensive private insurance and government programs like Medicare and Medicaid that properly reimburse for services. ... The Wisconsin Medical Society supports either the full Medicaid expansion up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level or the hybrid Medicaid expansion... ." (Hybrid refers to Arkansas, which uses Medicaid expansion funding to buy Affordable Care Act private insurance to cover Medicaid enrollees).

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Grapentine went further: “The Wisconsin Medical Society recognizes the essential principle of universal coverage in health system reform. This needs to be achieved through any or all of the following: employer participation, individual participation, government participation and could be supplemented with ... the use of tax credits, the use of medical savings accounts (and) the use of catastrophic insurance.”

He then went on to address Medicaid unwinding: “As for the unwinding, we’re in regular contact with the state’s Department of Health Services and CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services). We’ve let our members know about webinars ... (on)

how to get patients aware of the need to get evaluated for renewal. We’re seeing stories in other states of far too many patients bounced out of Medicaid because of paperwork problems, and that’s definitely not what we want to mimic in Wisconsin.”

Medicaid expansion, 90 percent federally funded, with additional generous federal funding for 2 years, is on the table for Wisconsin. Three GOP-led states, Missouri, Oklahoma and South Dakota, and politically divided North Carolina, will get all of that federal money because they recently expanded Medicaid. Wisconsin is forfeiting billions in federal funding and coverage for 90,000 Wisconsinites by not expanding Medicaid. Will Assembly Speaker Robin Vos follow the lead of other GOP state legislative speakers around the nation in expanding Medicaid? Change is blowing in the wind. Speaker Vos should listen to Wisconsin doctors and GOP-led states that expanded Medicaid. Circumstances have changed. Let’s move forward.

Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the *Wisconsin State Journal* from 1995 – 2009.