

Legislative Democrats: Introduce Healthy Wisconsin legislation to expand access to affordable, quality health care

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MADISON – Today, Democratic legislators released four key pieces of *Healthy Wisconsin* legislation to expand access to quality, affordable healthcare for all Wisconsinites, regardless of income or healthcare needs.

BadgerCare Expansion, introduced by Sen. Dianne Hesselbein (D-Middleton) and Rep. Daniel Riemer (D-Milwaukee), would provide insurance coverage for tens of thousands of Wisconsinites who currently lack access to care. Wisconsin is one of only ten states that have not chosen to expand their Medicaid program. Doing so would enable the state to receive \$1.2 billion in federal healthcare funds only available to states that expand coverage.

“We hear a lot of talk under this dome about common sense and focusing on taxpayers. It’s about time to apply that talk to action,” said Sen. Hesselbein. *“It’s time for our Republican colleagues to stop denying coverage and leaving billions of Wisconsin tax dollars in Washington, DC.”*

“Expanding BadgerCare will allow our state to receive over a billion dollars in this biennium and improve health outcomes in Wisconsin,” said Rep. Riemer, *“It’s a win for Wisconsin taxpayers and a win for the tens of thousands of individuals who will be newly covered under the expansion by receiving access to affordable, high-quality health care. Accepting the expansion is a no-brainer. I hope my Republican colleagues will finally do the fiscally responsible thing and support this bill to make our state, the Badger State, stronger.”*

BadgerCare Public Option, introduced by Sen. LaTonya Johnson (D-Milwaukee) and Rep. Kristina Shelton (D-Green Bay), would create a public option to allow individuals and small businesses to purchase affordable health coverage under a state exchange, similar to BadgerCare Plus. Currently, more than 300,000 Wisconsin residents lack health insurance, according to a [study](#) commissioned last year by the Wisconsin Office of the Commissioner of Insurance. This bill provides affordable options for those who currently lack coverage.

“BadgerCare is a trusted health plan that works in every community, covering over a million people across the state,” said Sen. Johnson. *“Creating a BadgerCare Public Option is one way we can offer accessible and affordable healthcare coverage to all Wisconsinites who need it.”*

“The BadgerCare Public Option bill not only increases healthcare access for working individuals but it also opens the door to cost-saving provisions for small businesses. This legislation critically supports working families and people in need by increasing access and expanding healthcare options,” said Rep. Shelton. *“Over and over, I’ve heard from my constituents and Wisconsinites statewide – they are begging the legislature to take bold action on healthcare. This bill is a massive step forward to ensuring healthcare is a human right for all Wisconsinites.”*

Less for Rx, introduced by Sen. Brad Pfaff (D-Onalaska), Sen. Dianne Hesselbein (D-Middleton), and Rep. Lisa Subeck (D-Madison), includes two bills that would make prescription drugs more affordable for Wisconsinites. According to a recent [Kaiser Family Foundation survey](#), more than 1 in 4 Americans who take prescription drugs report difficulty affording their prescriptions, and nearly a third have rationed their medications due to cost. The proposed legislation follows recommendations of Governor Evers’s [Task Force on Reducing Prescription Drug Prices](#) and includes the creation of the Office of Prescription Drug Affordability and the Prescription Drug Review Board, among other measures.

“No one should be forced to ration or skip the medication they need because it is too expensive. Relief for Wisconsinites to afford their medications is long overdue. I’m proud to introduce legislation to increase transparency in prescription drug pricing for consumers and lower prescription drug costs so everyone in Wisconsin can afford their medications,” said Sen. Pfaff. *“Legislation for patients to pay Less for Rx is a simple, straightforward solution to address the high cost of prescription drugs. Greater transparency in prescription drug prices and ways to control their costs puts more money in the pocket of our constituents and is good for our state.”*

“In a Healthy Wisconsin, every Wisconsinite would have access to quality healthcare at a price they can afford. This includes necessary preventative care and treatment to meet both physical and mental health needs,” said Rep. Subeck. *“And in a Healthy Wisconsin, patients could afford the lifesaving medications they and their doctors determine they need without having to choose between filling their prescriptions and paying their bills or putting food on their tables. Our Less for Rx legislation takes a comprehensive approach to reducing what Wisconsinites pay for their prescription drugs.”*

The four *Healthy Wisconsin* bills introduced today include:

BadgerCare Expansion, [LRB-3728](#),(Hesselbein/Riemer) - Changes income eligibility thresholds for certain populations for the state’s Medicaid program (BadgerCare) to up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), making it effectively 138 percent FPL due to 5 percent income disregard. Under the Affordable Care Act, this change allows Wisconsin to receive an enhanced federal medical assistance percentage payment (FMAP) for newly eligible individuals. Under the American Rescue Plan Act, it qualifies Wisconsin for a \$1.2 billion federal incentive while extending BadgerCare eligibility to tens of thousands of Wisconsinites.

BadgerCare Public Option, [LRB-4871](#), (L. Johnson/Shelton) - Under this bill, the Department of Health Services will establish a program for individuals and small businesses under 50 employees to purchase health care coverage through the state exchange similar to BadgerCare Plus. It will also create a Basic Health Plan available in the state’s insurance marketplace as established by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), covering individuals earning between 133-200% of the FPL. In addition, it will establish a state insurance exchange, as opposed to using the federal marketplace (healthcare.gov), and will increase access to healthcare opportunities by giving our state more freedom in coordinating enrollment periods, promoting options available, and providing support for Wisconsinites needing assistance in enrollment.

Less for Rx, [LRB-4894](#) (Pfaff/Subeck) & **[LRB-4895](#)** (Hesselbein/Subeck) - This legislation follows recommendations of Gov. Tony Evers’s [Task Force on Reducing Prescription Drug Prices](#) to make prescription drugs more affordable for Wisconsinites. Highlights include creating an Office of Prescription Drug Affordability and a Prescription Drug Affordability Review Board, requiring transparency and reporting across the entire prescription drug supply chain, capping the cost of insulin, and creating an insulin safety net program.