

News Release: Rural Pennsylvania Benefits When State Policymakers Use Medicaid to Increase Health Coverage



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January 24, 2013 (Pennsylvania) — Today, the Pennsylvania Health Law Project, a public interest law firm, released a state-specific analysis highlighting the benefits for rural Pennsylvania if state policymakers increase Medicaid coverage. Approximately 400,000 rural Pennsylvanians do not have health insurance. “It is important for Pennsylvania lawmakers to consider the value of this opportunity”, says PHLP Executive Director Laval Miller-Wilson.

PHLP’s analysis, “[Medicaid Expansion: A Benefit for Rural Pennsylvania](#)”, is co-authored by the [Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health](#) (PORH). It highlights the issues that rural Pennsylvanians face regarding health status and access to health care services, including the fact that rural Pennsylvanians have higher rates of chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, and arthritis than those living in urban areas.

The analysis also shows the percentage of residents enrolled in Medicaid in each of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties. Medicaid enrollment is high in rural areas. “Rural workers need Medicaid because they have less access to employer-sponsored insurance”, says Lisa Davis, Director of PORH. “Tens of thousands of rural parents would have access to much needed health care, which creates healthier individuals and families.”

The investment will not only insure hundreds of thousands of low-income Pennsylvanians, it also will maintain the viability of rural and safety-net hospitals currently providing care to many uninsured patients. Without this funding, some hospitals in rural areas may not survive. Closing hospitals creates a domino effect that impacts all health care providers in the community.

A decision not to expand Medicaid also means Pennsylvania taxpayers would be funding states that *do* adopt the Medicaid expansion. To date, 20 other states (including Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico and North Dakota) have already decided to expand Medicaid.

Pennsylvania Health Law Project (PHLP) is the state's oldest health care non-profit law firm exclusively devoted to health access for vulnerable populations. PHLP was founded to advance access to quality health care for vulnerable and disenfranchised communities. In addition to direct legal assistance, we work on policy and practice changes that maximize health coverage and access to care. We are a trusted resource with on-the-ground experience, knowledge of best practices, and an understanding of community perspectives.

The *Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health (PORH)* works with local state and federal partners to achieve equity in, and access to, quality health care for Pennsylvania's rural residents. PORH's strategies include: compiling, analyzing, and disseminating information to policy makers, health providers, health educators, and health administrators; strengthening the existing network of rural providers, planners, and advocates by encouraging partnerships and identifying opportunities for collaboration and cooperation; increasing interest in rural health needs, opportunities, and policy issues; and acting as a liaison between academia, state government, professional associations, and the general public.