

MEDICAID EXPANSION IN NORTH CAROLINA



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Expanding Medicaid would help address health disparities and promote health equity, particularly for communities of color and rural communities that have been disproportionately impacted by lack of access to healthcare.

The discussion of Medicaid Expansion is critical, as it is significantly associated with improved care, increased access, and reduced cost of health care (Mazurenko et al., 2018, Metzger et al., 2021). In states where Medicaid expansion is implemented, the uninsured rate decreased by 17% (Metzger et al., 2021). Lack of health care coverage disproportionately impacts Black families (Metzger et al., 2021). There is a vast need for states like North Carolina to take up the cause of implementing Medicaid expansion.

Context and Scope of the Problem

Medicaid provides coverage for over 62 million individuals and families (Crowley & Golden, 2014). Under the Affordable Care and Patient Protect Act, low-income individuals and those living up to 138% of the federal poverty level were to become eligible for Medicaid (Crowley & Golden, 2014). However, the Supreme Court decided that states should have the authority to expand eligibility for Medicaid (Crowley & Golde, 2014). North Carolina remains one of the few states that has not implemented Medicaid Expansion.

If North Carolina were to expand Medicaid, it would bring a plethora of benefits to citizens, such as: saving lives and increasing life expectancy, increasing access to mental health and substance use treatment, supporting working families and veterans, and improving the quality of care and service delivery in rural areas (NCDHHS, 2022). Moreover, research has identified that Medicaid expansion in North Carolina would lead to increased rates of colorectal cancer screenings among eligible men (Powell et al., 2020). Most citizens in the state believe everyone should have access to care, but the argument arises regarding how expansion should be funded. Currently, over 390,000 North Carolinians, who would be eligible for health care under Medicaid expansion, are uninsured (Taylor, 2017). Governor Cooper has informed the state legislature that by delaying implementing Medicaid expansion, the state is losing out on extra federal funding (Norris, 2022).

As mentioned previously, Blacks face greater chances than Whites of experiencing a lack of health care coverage. Moreover, this impacts child delivery for Black mothers. Medicaid expansions in other states caused a statistically significant decline in Black

infant mortality deaths (Constantin & Wehby, 2022). Moreover, the overall infant mortality rate significantly decreased (Constantin & Wehby, 2022). As of 2020, Blacks' infant mortality death rates were 12 per 1,000 births. North Carolina could decrease the number significantly by adopting Medicaid expansion.

Medicaid expansion will also serve as a great benefit to small businesses. Although the Affordable Care Act extended health coverage to many small business owners, self-employed individuals still are at risk of needing more coverage. A study by Lee and Winters (2021) revealed that low income is a barrier to self-employment and the development of small businesses. However, with Medicaid expansion, there would be an increase in health insurance coverage for the low-income and self-employed. The study also revealed that the same individuals reported better health status (Lee & Winters, 2021). In Missouri, Medicaid expansion led to an additional 300,000 low-wage earners receiving health coverage. North Carolina—it's time to adopt Medicaid expansion; there is funding to support the program, and passing Medicaid expansion will show North Carolinians, especially those most vulnerable, that they are cared for. They, too, deserve to live a healthy life.