

State expands health coverage for 35,000 Minnesotans

Written by

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Governor Mark Dayton signed legislation that will provide access to quality health care coverage for an additional 35,000 low-income adults on Tuesday, February 19. The bill (HF9), authored by Rep. Tom Huntley (DFL – Duluth) and Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL – Mankato), takes advantage of a key component of the federal Affordable Care Act, which allows states to expand Medical Assistance (MA) eligibility.

The expansion of MA eligibility provides \$129 million in projected savings for the 2014-15 biennium. This is in addition to the \$1.3 billion Minnesota is already expected to save by 2015 as a result of the Affordable Care Act. The Governor's budget proposal builds on these savings and includes additional improvements to Medical Assistance that will provide coverage for a total of 145,000 Minnesotans.

"Minnesotans who will be covered by this legislation desperately need better quality health care," said Governor Dayton. "Instead of taking their health crises to emergency rooms, thousands of low-income children, families, and individuals will be able to see doctors sooner and live healthier lives."

"Our goal is to offer access to quality healthcare to everyone in Minnesota," said Sen. Sheran, who authored the bill in the Senate. "This legislation gets us one step closer to that goal by covering healthcare for persons earning less than \$15,000 a year and will mean a cost savings of \$1 billion to the state over the next couple of years. Saving those dollars will help us expand access to care for even more Minnesotans."

One of Governor Dayton's first acts in office was signing an Executive Order expanding access to Medical Assistance for 83,000 low-income Minnesotans. In doing so, the governor provided access to quality health care for those who need it most – reducing the burden of uncompensated care on hospitals and saving an estimated 20,000 health care sector jobs.

The bill signed into law builds on that important progress by covering more uninsured Minnesotans, maximizing federal funding for public health care programs, and simplifying the enrollment process. Providing coverage for more Minnesotans will reduce the hidden tax that is passed onto Minnesotans with health insurance to pay for uncompensated care.

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"This legislation allows us to cover more Minnesotans with health insurance and at the same time get more bang for our buck for Minnesota taxpayers," said Rep. Huntley, the bill's House author. "In addition, this helps our hospitals across the state and is better for our economy and state budget moving forward. This is a win-win for all Minnesotans."

Across the country legislatures and both Democratic and Republican governors are opting to expand MA eligibility under federal health care reform. The federal government will fund 100 percent of the proposed expansion through 2016. Starting in 2017, the federal government will gradually reduce that support, funding 90 percent of the expansion by 2020.