

# Expanding Health Coverage In Texas

By Eric Galatas for Texas News Service

AUSTIN—In the wake of the latest U.S. Supreme Court ruling upholding the Affordable Care Act, Texas health advocates are working to close the health care coverage gap for the state's 1.5 million uninsured adults.

Anne Dunkelberg, associate director with the Center for Public Policy Priorities, says working families are paying the price for the state's decision not to expand Medicaid coverage. She says a family of four earning \$25,000 a year, considered above the poverty line, can pay as little as \$45 a month for coverage with federal subsidies.

"But their next-door neighbors who are making \$1,500 a year less? For those parents, there's no Medicaid for them. They can't get subsidies in the marketplace," says Dunkelberg. "They have to pay full price if they want insurance, which would be around \$450 a month."

Dunkelberg's group, and others, are organizing to convince Gov. Abbott to embrace a waiver plan to bridge the coverage gap. She says they've lined up a broad coalition of business, faith and consumer groups, launched a petition campaign, and will testify at meetings throughout July held by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

States that don't like the idea of expanding Medicaid coverage as prescribed by Obamacare can apply for a waiver and still receive federal support. Dunkelberg says there's a good economic argument for Texas to follow the lead of so-called "red states," like Arkansas, that opted for a conservative waiver.

"The flexibility is there to do an alternative," she says. "That will bring in between \$6 billion and \$10 billion a year for Texas in new federal health-care spending, and create somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000 jobs."

Dunkelberg notes Texas is one of 21 states in the nation refusing to expand Medicaid eligibility. She says as a result, more than 4 million residents of those states remain uninsured.

## Smoke Damage At House

A house in the 200 block of Avenue C received some smoke damage from a malfunctioning air conditioner motor. The local Volunteer Fire Dept. received a call about the malfunction on Thursday, July 17. The Fire Dept. personnel responded.

## County Fair, Harvest Days Are Sept. 10-12

The Castro County Fair and Harvest Days will be September 10-12. If you are interested in renting a booth for Saturday, September 12, contact Donna at 647-2243 or email her at dsr60@windstream.net. Also, you may call the Chamber of Commerce at 647-2524.

Booth rental is \$40 per booth for those inside the Expo Bldg. and \$30 for those outside or inside quonset barns. Electricity for booths is \$5 extra.

Booths inside the Expo go fast and are rented on first-come, first-serve basis.

# Medicaid Waiver Hearings Offer Opportunity For Texans To Comment On Health Care Reform

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) is holding eight local hearings—including one to be held in Amarillo next Friday, July 24—about the state's Medicaid 1115 Waiver. These hearings are an important opportunity for Texans to discuss the future of the state's health care system, including closing the "Coverage Gap" by expanding Medicaid, with federal funds, to low-income adult Texans.

For the last five years, Texas has been operating under a Medicaid waiver—called the 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver—authorized by the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The 1115 Waiver allowed for the expansion of Medicaid managed care in the state, and for the creation of two funding pools. One pool promotes innovative healthcare collaborations designed to strengthen health care delivery systems. The other provides "uncompensated care" reimbursement to hospitals that serve large numbers of uninsured patients.

As the final year of the project approaches, efforts are underway to renew the 1115 Waiver for three to five more years. These eight hearings, which are being held throughout the state, offer the opportunity to get public input on the priorities for Texas' waiver renewal. They provide a forum to discuss the health care needs of our communities with the HHSC, and to have them documented.

CMS has already notified Texas that the state will not be able to keep getting the same amount of support for uncompensated care costs if the state

does not take advantage of the available opportunities to provide more citizens health care coverage by opting into either Medicaid expansion or an alternative private market solution.

Without a coverage plan, Texas' yearly federal waiver funding could be cut by \$1 billion or more. With a coverage plan, the state would gain an estimated \$5-10 billion per year in federal healthcare funds—funds which are for keeping hospitals open and healthcare systems working for the entire state.

The 1115 Waiver funds are not a substitute for coverage. They do not provide health coverage for anybody. They do not provide individuals with the financial security of having coverage, the preventive healthcare services which prevent chronic illness, or the care for chronic illness that prevents costly outcomes and makes for a much wiser use of taxpayer dollars.

According to the Center for Public Policy Priorities, Texas would benefit from a waiver

renewal that includes Medicaid expansion funds that would allow the state to expand coverage to one million low-wage working Texans. By combining the coverage solution with the Medicaid 1115 Waiver renewal request, the state would have a better standing to maintain maximum federal support for innovations, reduce the need for uncompensated care, and keep the largest possible funding coming in for the uninsured in Texas.

In addition to public hearings being held in Houston, Edinburg, Tyler, Austin, San Antonio, Dallas/Ft. Worth and El Paso, Texas Panhandle residents will have the opportunity to weigh in on this important decision at a public hearing to be held Friday, July 24, from 1-3 p.m. at the Region 1 Educational Services Center in Amarillo.

HHSC staff will be present at the public hearings to give a brief presentation of the key components of the waiver renewal packet, and to take public comments on the waiver renewal.

## Texas Sales Tax Holiday Is Aug. 7-9

AUSTIN—Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar reminds shoppers they can save money on certain items priced under \$100 during the state's annual sales tax holiday. This year, the sales tax holiday is Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 7-9.

The law exempts most clothing, footwear, school supplies and backpacks priced under \$100 from sales tax, which could save shoppers about \$8 on every \$100 they spend during the weekend.

Lists of apparel and school supplies that may be purchased tax-free can be found on the comptroller's website at [TexasTaxHoliday.org](http://TexasTaxHoliday.org).

This year, shoppers will save an estimated \$87 million in state and local sales taxes during the sales tax holiday.