



Released by Close the Gap Idaho

June 17, 2017

For a Healthier State, Close the Gap Idaho Looks Forward to Working with the Coverage Gap Work Group

BOISE— Members of Close the Gap Idaho, a coalition of healthcare policy experts, non-profit leaders, healthcare providers and other supporters, expressed optimism that a work group named Friday by Senate Pro Tem Brent Hill and House Speaker Scott Bedke will focus on finding a complete, Idaho-based solution to the coverage gap.

During the summer meeting of the Legislative Council, Pro Tem Hill and Speaker Bedke appointed legislators to an interim work group titled, “Healthcare Alternatives for Citizens,” tasked with finding a policy solution to the healthcare coverage gap. Today, 78,000 Idahoans lack any form of health insurance; they fall in the “coverage gap.” Those in the gap do not qualify for Medicaid and earn too little to receive assistance on Idaho’s insurance exchange. A majority of those in the coverage gap are working at least one job and have children in the home.

“We are eager to find a path forward for the tens of thousands of Idahoans living without affordable medical care,” said Susie Pouliot, CEO of the Idaho Medical Association. “It is vitally important that the workgroup develop a complete solution that brings our federal tax dollars back to Idaho, replaces our costly and inefficient indigent system and ensures that all Idahoans have full health coverage.”

During the 2016 legislative session multiple proposals were introduced to address the coverage gap issue, including a governor-backed plan to give enhanced funding to primary care. The governor’s proposal failed in committee, after healthcare leaders and several legislators expressed concern that the bill did not do enough to provide comprehensive health coverage to those in the gap.

“Many of the medical conditions Idahoans face cannot be fully addressed in a primary care setting,” said Bruce Belzer, MD, President Elect of the Idaho Medical Association, “Primary care is critical, but without treatment it doesn’t solve our patient’s problems and creates unnecessary added costs down the road, when conditions worsen. This is particularly true with a population that has historically lacked coverage to deal with health problems in a timely and effective manner.”

The Close the Gap coalition is working with policymakers to advance a comprehensive, managed care solution that includes insurance coverage of primary care, specialty care, hospitalization, labs, pharmacy and behavioral healthcare. By taking advantage of healthcare dollars already set aside for Idaho to extend coverage to the gap

population, the state and counties will save millions of dollars they now spend on emergency care for people without health insurance.

“Right now, healthcare for the gap population is either paid for via county and state indigent funds, or results in medical bankruptcy for families living in the coverage gap and these costs are absorbed by providers, resulting in increased costs for everyone,” said Brian Whitlock, President/CEO of the Idaho Hospital Association.

“Close the Gap Idaho is here to support the workgroup in its efforts and we look forward to the opportunity to address this issue once and for all with a complete, Idaho-based solution to the coverage gap.”

For more information:

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