

# Deseret News

## Diverse groups urge Herbert to expand Medicaid in Utah

By Dennis Romboy , Deseret News

Published: Friday, Nov. 1 2013 2:30 p.m. MDT



Karen Crompton, president and CEO of Voices for Utah Children speaks to the media while joining the Coalition for a Compassionate Utah and other local agencies outside the Governor's Mansion to advocate for Gov. Gary Herbert to expand Medicaid to the 123,000 Utah residents who currently go without health care on Thursday, Oct. 31, 2013. (Matt Gade, Deseret News)

**SALT LAKE CITY** — A collection of advocacy groups whose top issues aren't necessarily health care joined forces Friday to urge Gov. Gary Herbert to expand Medicaid in Utah.

Calling themselves the Coalition for a Compassionate Utah, several advocates made their case outside the governor's mansion for 123,000 needy residents who aren't eligible for the federal health care program.

"It is a Utah value, and we do believe that every Utah citizen deserves this sort of care regardless of their ability to pay," said Jenn Gonnely, co-president of the League of Women Voters of Utah.

The league is among a dozen diverse organizations that make up the coalition, including Utah Parents Against Gun Violence, the Utah AFL/CIO and the Sierra Club. They created a website, [compassionateutah.org](http://compassionateutah.org), where residents can go to call on Herbert to sign off on Medicaid expansion.



Isaac Holyoak with Alliance for a Better Utah joined the Coalition for a Compassionate Utah outside the Governor's Mansion to advocate for Gov. Gary Herbert to expand Medicaid to the 123,000 Utah residents who currently go without health care on Thursday, Oct. 31, 2013. (Matt Gade, Deseret News)

Maryann Martindale, executive director of the Alliance for a Better Utah, said the coalition brings a unique voice to the debate.

"Up until this point, it's been the usual suspects, as it were," Martindale said.

Now, she said, in addition to advocates for low-income Utahns, groups that usually don't take a health care stance but have a broad reach can turn up the volume on the governor.

"This is actually everyone's issue," Martindale said. "We're not just going to leave the message to just those that are trying to supplement and help this community that needs Medicaid expansion."

At his recent health summit, Herbert said he is reviewing Medicaid expansion options and working with legislators for a "Utah solution."



Maryann Martindale, executive director of Alliance for a Better Utah, speaks as part of the Coalition for a Compassionate Utah outside the Governor's Mansion to advocate for Gov. Gary Herbert to expand Medicaid to the 123,000 Utah residents who currently go without health care on Thursday, Oct. 31, 2013. (Matt Gade, Deseret News)

"The governor wants to make the right decision for Utah that strikes a proper balance between helping the most vulnerable residents and being responsible with the taxpayers' dollars. The decision-making process set forth by the governor has been deliberative and inclusive," Herbert's spokeswoman, Ally Isom, said in a statement Friday.

In addition to an economic analysis of a potential expansion — which projects enhanced revenues, more local jobs and a decrease in uncompensated care — Herbert convened a task force to study expansion options.

"The good news is he hasn't said no. I still think he's open. I wish he'd make up his mind and say yes, of course. But the fact that it's still on the table is an opportunity for us to weigh in," said Karen Crompton, president of Voices for Utah Children.



Members of the Coalition for a Compassionate Utah and other local agencies gathered outside the Governor's Mansion to advocate for Gov. Gary Herbert to expand Medicaid to the 123,000 Utah residents who currently go without health care on Thursday, Oct. 31, 2013. (Matt Gade, Deseret News)

More than 370,000 Utahns are uninsured, and about 123,000 would be eligible for state and federally funded Medicaid programs under a full expansion, which is an option under the Affordable Care Act.

The federal government intends to fully fund the initial phase of the expansion, beginning Jan. 1, for states that have already opted in. Reimbursement rates would decrease over time.

Crompton said there would be a "coverage gap" without Medicaid expansion, leaving 60,000 residents living in poverty with no options for coverage. Some people will make too much money to qualify but not enough to get a tax subsidy through the health care exchanges.

For example, a mom and dad who have two children and earn \$90,000 a year would be able to get a tax credit for health insurance, but a single mom who earns \$15,000 annually wouldn't get any help, she said.

Crompton said there also would be a disparity between Utahns in similar financial situations as residents of neighboring states — Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada — that have signed up for expansion.



Karen Crompton, president and CEO of Voices for Utah Children speaks to the media while joining the Coalition for a Compassionate Utah and other local agencies outside the Governor's Mansion to advocate for Gov. Gary Herbert to expand Medicaid to the 123,000 Utah residents who currently go without health care on Thursday, Oct. 31, 2013. (Matt Gade, Deseret News)

Utah is among 25 states that have not expanded Medicaid.

Email: [romboy@deseretnews.com](mailto:romboy@deseretnews.com) Twitter: dennisromboy

Copyright 2013, Deseret News Publishing Company