

'It Is Truly Saving Lives'

Louisiana Governor Outlines the Importance of Medicaid Expansion

GOV. JOHN BEL EDWARDS

For many years, Louisiana had one of the nation's highest rates of uninsured residents, with nearly 23 percent of adults not having health insurance coverage. Louisiana has also routinely ranked among states with the highest rates of cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and overall poor health. Because so many of our people lacked health coverage, hundreds of thousands were not able to regularly visit the doctor, receive preventive care or manage their health conditions. When the Affordable Care Act allowed states to expand their Medicaid programs to include working poor adults, I knew that Louisiana particularly stood to benefit from this new program. I was dismayed that the prior administration refused to bring our federal tax dollars home to Louisiana to care for our people. That's why I made Medicaid expansion a centerpiece of my campaign for governor.

I often reflect on Matthew 25:40, "... whatever you did for one of these least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." To me, that means we all have a responsibility to take care of one another — especially those who are the most vulnerable in our society.

My first official act as governor of our great state was adopting Medicaid expansion for our hard-working people. It was a choice driven not by partisanship, but by the people of many different backgrounds whom I met every day at churches, restaurants, gas stations and visiting communities across Louisiana. I suspect many governors who have made similar decisions did so because they saw a need for it.

Now that over two years have passed since coverage became more accessible, there is over-

whelming proof of the positive impact Medicaid expansion is having throughout Louisiana in terms of health outcomes for our citizens, jobs and the economy.

It is truly saving lives. Ricky shared with us that he enrolled to receive coverage as soon as he could. He visited a primary care doctor because he was having abdominal pain, and because of Medicaid expansion, he was able to get a colonoscopy that discovered he had Stage IV colon cancer. Today, he is receiving chemotherapy and taking the proper medications as he recovers.

Medicaid expansion led directly to a historic decline in the uninsured rate in Louisiana — from 22.7 percent in 2015 to 11.4 percent in 2017.

Medicaid expansion also resulted in significant economic growth for our state, creating

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more than 19,000 new jobs. In fact, a recent study by economists from Louisiana State University shows that expansion led to \$3.57 billion of economic activity and provided \$175 million in state and local tax receipts. On top of all this, the Trump administration has praised the efforts Louisiana has taken to root out fraud within the Medicaid system.

While the economic impact is significant, the most important result we've seen is more people having affordable access to preventive care, which we know is necessary to improving health outcomes.

The Louisiana Department of Health developed a fantastic resource that tracks the real impact of Medicaid expansion in people's lives. You can visit www.ldh.la.gov/HealthyLaDash board to get up-to-date statistics. As of October 2018, here's what's been accomplished through expansion:

Total Enrollment – 477,628

- **Doctor Visits** – 241,647
- **Breast Cancer Screenings** – 51,639
 - *Breast cancer diagnoses* – 505
- **Colon Cancer Screenings** – 28,635
 - *9,162 adults with colon polyps removed*
 - *390 adults diagnosed with colon cancer*
- **Diabetes** – 10,092 people newly diagnosed
- **Hypertension** – 27,197 newly diagnosed
- **Mental Health Services** – 79,035 adults receiving mental health services
- **Substance Abuse Help** – 25,019 adults receiving substance use services

These numbers represent real people in our community. Travel to any corner of Louisiana, and you'll undoubtedly meet some of the working people who have benefited from Medicaid expansion. You'll meet people from all walks of life — teachers, oil field workers and fishermen, just to name a few.

Many of these Americans have jobs, but they are either barely getting by or have fallen on hard times and are simply looking for a chance to get back on their feet. Some are in desperate need of treatment for a mental illness or need help to overcome an addiction. Often their plans have been sidelined by an illness that, in many cases, they didn't even know they had until they got coverage under Medicaid expansion.

People like Matthew Guidry, of Opelousas, Louisiana. Matthew has lived with sickle cell anemia his entire life. Prior to Medicaid expansion, the only medical help he could receive came from his local emergency room. Because of expansion, Matthew now has a primary care physician who is helping him with disease infection prevention, ongoing vision problems and pain management.

Expanding Medicaid was the easiest big decision I've made as governor. Not only was this the right decision morally, it was the right decision for the overall health of our people, budget and economy.

JOHN BEL EDWARDS is the governor of Louisiana.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

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Reprinted from *Health Progress*, January-February 2019
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