

# NEWS BRIEFS

Informational Newsletter for Wyoming Hospitals

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**WHA Calendar:**

Wyoming  
Legislature  
Convenes 1/8

**Other Events:**

WyICN  
Membership  
Meeting 1/25

Rural Healthcare  
Leadership  
Conference 2/10-  
Phoenix, AZ 2/13

## Full Medicaid Expansion Offers Win-Win for Wyoming and its Hospitals

By Dan Perdue, WHA President

As legislators prepare for 40 days of work in Cheyenne, perhaps no issue they will face will loom as large as the reform of Wyoming's Medicaid program.

Lawmakers will surely also face tough decisions regarding highway funding and education accountability, among others. But with a single program costing the state some \$500 million each year, Medicaid reform and related healthcare issues will be front and center.

In considering how to provide care for Wyoming's citizens while controlling program costs, the Legislature should support the full expansion of Medicaid that is allowed under the Affordable Care Act.

Under the ACA, Wyoming must cover an estimated 10,600 newly eligible children and others. Legislators now must decide whether to add another 17,600 low-income adults, for a total of 28,200 new enrollees if the program were fully expanded.

The federal government would cover all of these costs for the first three years, and never less than 90 percent of those costs.

There are at least three key reasons that legislators should support the full expansion.

First, the full expansion is good for Wyoming's patients. One of the surest ways to improve overall health and control costs is for patients to receive the right care, from the right provider, at the right time.

Providing coverage for more than 28,000 Wyoming citizens – often described as the working poor – will provide that access to care. We know that patients who receive preventive care, or who receive care earlier, tend not to be as sick when they do need care.

By contrast, a study conducted by the Hospital Industry Data Institute and funded by the Wyoming Hospital Association, indicated that uninsured patients who visited Wyoming hospitals in 2012 were generally older than Medicaid patients, and they were more likely to have one or more chronic conditions.

In other words, the very uninsured population that the Medicaid expansion would cover is aging, sick, and, as a result, costly. Expanding coverage is the right step for

improving the health of this sizeable group of Wyoming citizens.

Second, the full expansion could save the state \$47 million over six years, according to a study released by the Department of Health. These savings can only be achieved, however, if the Legislature supports the full expansion of the program.

Finally, the full expansion will help ensure that Wyoming's providers can continue to provide care for our vulnerable populations. In 2011, Wyoming hospitals provided about \$200 million in uncompensated care – up from about \$126 million in 2007.

At the same time, federal assistance for hospitals that treat large numbers of low-income and uninsured patients has been slashed.

The impact of both the dramatic growth in uncompensated care and the reductions in this federal assistance would be significantly offset through the full Medicaid expansion.

We recognize that our legislators face a number of difficult issues in the upcoming session, and few decisions will be clear-cut. But the full expansion of Medicaid simply makes sense, for our patients, our state, and our providers.



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



*Don't forget to send us a story about your hospital so we can feature you in our Member Spotlight*



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## SMH Employees Donate Money to ICU Remodel

Sheridan Memorial Hospital employee partners voted to give nearly \$30,000 to support a future expansion and remodel of the hospital's intensive care unit.

The funds were accumulated during the last year from payroll deductions made by 423 employee partners.

The vote took place during the eighth annual Partner Celebration last month. In addition to the vote, partners were treated to breakfast provided by the hospital

foundation and prepared by the nutritional services staff.

"I give to the hospital through the foundation because my dollar makes an impact on patient care," said Lynnette Bradley, and employee in the purchasing department.

"It's been fun over the years, and I like that I'm part of the decision making process."

Marta Ostler, a physical therapist, added that it is important to give back to the community.

"There is an element of ownership to be able to pick a program or project, like the intensive care unit, where our employee dollars are contributed," she said.

The Employee Partner Program was created more than eight years ago as a way to further involve hospital employees in the foundation's mission to cultivate community health and promote the vision of the hospital.

It has generated \$210,000 since it began.

## Fiscal Cliff Deal Protects Rural Health Programs

Hundreds of millions of dollars in rural health cuts were prevented by the last-minute 'fiscal cliff' deal that Congress passed last week.

The bill passed the Senate by a vote of 89-9, and it passed the House by a vote of 257-167.

The legislation reinstates critical Medicare reimbursement payments to more than 850 rural hospitals, and it prevented cuts to rural primary care physicians and rural ambulance

providers.

Additionally, the bill reinstated the Medicare-dependent hospital program and the low-volume hospital adjustment, both of which had expired on October 1.

Had Congress not restored these payments, many fiscally fragile rural facilities likely would have been forced to close their doors.

Despite the benefits of the deal to rural providers, the 2 percent across-the-board sequestration cuts were de-

layed for only two months.

As a result, political battles to protect rural hospitals and healthcare providers will begin again very soon.

Among the programs protected in last week's deal were the Medicare physician payment update—current payment rates were extended through 2013; and the Medicare inpatient hospital payment adjustment for low-volume hospitals—the payment adjustment was extended through 2013.

## Wyoming Recognized for e-Prescribing Achievement

In December, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) announced that Wyoming is one of five states to achieve a significant milestone in electronic prescribing.

Ninety-seven percent of Wyoming pharmacies are able to receive prescriptions electronically.

Wyoming e-Health Partnership is the non-profit organization leading health information exchange activities in Wyoming, and it has been monitoring Wyoming e-prescribing rates.

"This is great news for Wyoming," said Partnership CEO Heather Roe Day. "The decision by most Wyoming pharmacies to receive

e-prescriptions sets the stage for encouraging more providers to send prescriptions electronically.

E-prescribing makes it more convenient for patients to obtain their prescription medications and is a central part of exchanging health information in Wyoming," she said.