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 **news release**

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 **Medicaid Expansion Study Commission Making Real Progress**

CONCORD – The commission charged with studying options to expand Medicaid in New Hampshire is now considering a proposal that would both maximize the use of federal dollars and allow the state to tailor the program going forward.

Deb Fournier, a policy analyst with the New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute, said today the plan has the advantage of getting people covered starting January 1, when the federal government covers 100 percent of the costs. It also allows the state to move forward with efforts to encourage private coverage, reserving Medicaid for those who cannot get coverage otherwise. Some of those options would require approvals from the federal government that may take time.

“Starting on Jan. 1 helps thousands of people in New Hampshire who can’t get health insurance through their jobs or don’t qualify for subsidies in the new insurance marketplace,” Fournier said.

“Meanwhile the state can let the new Medicaid managed care program become established and take time to develop and implement approaches that involve new options for private insurance,” she said.

Under current law, the state can help low-income workers pay their premiums if they already have insurance through their employers. The Health Insurance Premium Program already exists and can be expanded to cover some of the new people who’d be added to Medicaid as long as it is voluntary. Commission members are interested in getting permission from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to make it mandatory that workers with insurance use the HIPP program, an option that will require a federal waiver.

Fournier noted the Medicaid expansion would bring roughly $2.4 million to the state by 2020 if it starts on Jan. 1 – a substantial boost to the state’s economy while extending coverage to approximately 60,000 low-income people over the next seven years.

The expansion calls for the federal government to pay 100 percent of the costs to cover Granite Staters earning up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level (earnings of about $16,000 for one person or $23,000 for a family of three) through 2016, scaling back gradually to 90 percent by 2020.

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