

Arise Town Hall Tuesday – Closing the coverage gap September 1, 2020

Discussed how everyone can help expand Medicaid in Alabama and the strategies of the Cover Alabama Coalition as it leads the campaign for expansion.

Kim Clark's Breakout Session

People were really fired up about this topic

- Educate people that without MCD expansion that rural hospitals are closing due to lack of funds
- People do not have personal experience with not having coverage or access to medical care and therefore do not understand the issue
- Blaming people for being poor/stigma

Possible action items

- Contact legislators and discuss their opposition to expansion – could be lack of knowledge or understanding of the problem
- Education to individuals in the community as to the impact of hospital closures or fewer MDs, e.g., fewer jobs, decrease in local revenue, etc.
- Conduct a video campaign, advertisement, FB & other social media with local celebrities being spokes people: Charles Barkley, Fannie, Flagg; hospital administrators talking about the impact to services

Presdelane Harris' Breakout Session

Participants answered the question – what do you think we need to do to achieve Medicaid Expansion in Alabama. Highlights to their responses:

- We need to elect different people. Of course we need to work to persuade those in office now, but ultimately, we need elected officials who act in best interest of their constituents.
- Focus messaging on the economic benefits and job creation aspects of expanding Medicaid. Initial money spent to expand will be recouped many times over.
- Keep lobbying our legislators and being persistent! Protests focused on the Governor and holding her accountable for the suffering as a result of not expanding. Emphasize to legislators the consequences of continuing not to act.
- Pay for expanding Medicaid by removing the FIT deduction. Show elected officials the greater cost of not expanding. Need to get creative in coming up with funding solutions. If we can do bond issues for other things like prisons, we can do a bond issue to fund expanding Medicaid. Another thing to consider, stop giving away tax incentives that may or may not yield a return on investment.
- Emphasize the impact of not expanding on rural hospitals and rural communities. Expanding Medicaid is the single most important thing we can do now to help rural hospitals, rural access to care.

- We must educate the public as well. The more people who understand the significance of expanding Medicaid, the more voices we can bring to bear with elected officials and the Governor to expand.
- **Answers to what they are willing to do:** advocate to the Governor and elected officials via letter writing campaigns, social media sharing and re-sharing, petitions, follow-up with Cover Alabama.

Stan Johnson's Breakout Session

1. First thing the group did was **recap the Medicaid income eligibility requirements**. It was hard for many in the group to accept a family of 4 (a mother and 2 children) could not make more than \$325 a month if the mother wanted to be eligible for Medicaid.
2. We discussed why Alabama did not expand Medicaid (along with 13 other southern state). The answer from some in the group was RACISM. It has long been felt government social programs were designed for poor blacks even though in Alabama statistically there are more Whites on Medicaid than Black Alabamians.
3. Education ... It is a must we all actively be involved in educating family, church members and neighbors on the benefits of Medicaid expansion . We have to be honest when talking about why Alabama did not expand when it would have been a Zero \$\$\$ buy in.

Mike Nicholson's Breakout Session

- My breakout room had a number of medical practitioners who had a lot of personal experience and suggestions to share.
- Two of the folks in my room identified themselves as being in the coverage gap.
- The introductions in this breakout were very detailed as folks connected with each other and spoke about their current work and the possibility of collaboration.
 - As a result, we our conversation focused more on personal experiences, storytelling, and collaboration than discussing issues.
- One member suggested that we make our Medicaid storybook more widely available, as well as releasing it online.
 - She also suggesting submitting some of the personal stories of folks in the gap to Reckon on AL.com.
 - Many in the group felt that this would be very convincing.
- Another participant advocated for emphasizing the economic decision making involved with expansion.
 - It isn't just about getting people healthcare (although that's important), it's also about creating jobs, saving our rural hospitals, and stimulating our economy.
- We also discussed the importance of communication and the lack of communication our state programs suffer from, especially Medicaid.
- We also talked about making and distributing an easy to consume one-pager that focused on the economic facts as well as a few personal stories to encourage folks to see the importance of expansion.

Debbie Smith's Breakout Session

- Participants emphasized the need to get as many calls into Governor Ivey as possible about Medicaid expansion. They suggested thanking her for the mask mandate first than asking about Medicaid expansion.

- Participants talked about how it can be difficult to answer legislators when they ask how to pay for Medicaid expansion. (Pre-covid, Medicaid expansion was expected to cost \$168Million in the first year.)
 - Cover Alabama Campaign Director, Jane Adams, answered this question by explaining that Alabama has the money to expand Medicaid. The legislature just needs the political will to do so. One way to answer this question is to point out how the legislature/Governor seems to always find funding for tax breaks for corporations, building prisons, etc.
- Participants suggested organizing physicians to advocate for Medicaid expansion. The legislature is more likely to listen to them.
- Participants asked if Governor Ivey or the state legislature has the power to expand Medicaid.
 - Governor Ivey can expand Medicaid by directing Alabama Medicaid to do so. The legislature would just need to appropriate the funds necessary.
- One participant suggested taxing people who have pension funds from the state to pay for Medicaid expansion. Currently, they do not pay any taxes on their retirement income.
- Participants were also concerned about existing issues with the Medicaid program.
 - Doctors are not reimbursed enough for providing Medicaid services. This leads to health care providers treating Medicaid patients differently than they do people with private insurance.
 - There is a stigma associated with the program, and it often leads to health care disparities for black and brown people.
 - Cover Alabama is working to collect the stories of people who have benefited from Medicaid coverage in order to reduce stigma.
 - Alabama Arise is also advocating to improve the current Medicaid program by lifting up consumer voices to address disparities and the [social determinants of health](#). Arise believes that the people with lived experience are the best people to develop solutions that will work.
 - One participant from this breakout room is working with Arise to develop a quality improvement plan to address food security issues through the Medicaid program. For more info, contact organizing director Pres Harris (pres@alarise.org)