OPINION:
Michigan’s Family Doctors Strongly Support Medicaid Expansion

(OKEMOS, Mich.) – The Michigan Academy of Family Physicians (MAFP)—representing more than 3,000 family doctors who care for millions of patients statewide—strongly urges the Michigan legislature to approve the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.

This proposal has already been endorsed by Governor Rick Snyder, many lawmakers in both political parties, a host of health associations, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan, and the Small Business Association of Michigan.

The members of MAFP bring a special perspective to the issue of Medicaid expansion. Although we work in a variety of settings—medical offices, public and private clinics, urgent care facilities, hospitals, universities, community health centers, and more—we are all primary care providers. Our patients are young and old, male and female, rich and poor, urban and rural, and of every race and ethnicity. The focus of Family physicians is on primary and secondary prevention of acute and chronic medical problems, such as infections, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, obesity, and tobacco addiction. We also coordinate care when specialty treatment is needed. We support individuals and families during times of crisis.

Research has conclusively shown that our work in preventive care limits progression of life-threatening conditions such as heart disease, stroke and cancer—and it leads to longer life expectancies. Moreover, research demonstrates that declining access to primary care is a major reason why the U.S. health care system achieves poorer outcomes than the health systems of other developed countries.

Collectively, the family physicians of MAFP provide tens of millions of dollars in uncompensated care each year to people who have no health insurance and can’t afford regular primary care. But charity cannot assure access to regular, affordable care for nearly half of Michigan’s 1.1 million residents who are currently uninsured.

The Medicaid expansion would extend coverage to these 450,000 low-income adults who don’t have health insurance now. It would broadly improve both the physical and financial health of patients, families, businesses, and communities throughout the state. Here’s how:

- The nearly half million uninsured Michiganders in question are now getting their health care in the most expensive way possible—through hospital emergency departments. The cost is “shifted” to everyone who is insured, adding a “hidden tax” of up to $1,000 to the annual cost of every health insurance premium.

- Expanded coverage would give these Michigan residents access to regular preventive medical care in lower-cost settings, keep them healthier, reduce the burden of uncompensated care on hospitals, and slow the rising cost of health insurance.

(more)
The expanded Medicaid coverage would be funded 100 percent (about $2 billion a year) by the federal government through 2016, then gradually decline to 90 percent in 2020 and beyond. Meanwhile, our state budget would immediately begin saving $280 million a year because Michigan’s non-Medicaid mental health expenditures would be covered by the expansion.

Moreover, the expansion would increase coverage options for small businesses, as well as cover employees who don’t earn enough to afford health insurance while working at companies that don't offer it.

Overall, Michigan’s economy would receive approximately $22 billion in new federal funds between 2014 and 2023, supporting thousands of health care jobs.

As physicians, we ask Michigan’s legislators to join us in saving Michigan money and saving Michigan lives by expanding Medicaid. At the end of the day, this issue comes down to patient care, not rigid political principle.

Dr. E. Christopher Bush, MD, is President of the Michigan Academy of Family Physicians. Dr. Fred J. Van Alstine, MD, MBA, is President-Elect of the Academy.

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About Michigan Academy of Family Physicians (MAFP)
The Michigan Academy of Family Physicians (MAFP) is the state’s largest specialty physician association. With more than 3,000 members, MAFP is dedicated to assisting family physicians and their practices as they work to ensure high-quality, cost-effective health care for patients of all ages. Visit us on the Web at: http://www.mafp.com