FLORIDA HEALTH JUSTICE PROJECT

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Florida Health Justice Project Stresses Economic Benefits of Expanding Medicaid in Florida

(Miami, Florida – February 4, 2020)-- The Florida Health Justice Project (FHJP) joins elected officials, physicians, health care providers and residents in calling for the expansion of Medicaid in Florida, one of only 14 states that has not done so since the passage of the Affordable Care Act.

"By not expanding Medicaid, Florida stands to lose billions of our tax dollars that could help residents get health care," said Miriam Harmatz, Executive Director of Florida Health Justice Project. "Over 400,000 low-income Floridians have no pathway to health coverage because our state has not expanded Medicaid."

Florida would receive $14.3 billion new federal dollars over the next five years if Medicaid were expanded, which would enable more than 830,000 Florida residents during that same period – nearly a quarter million in the Miami metro region alone – to get health coverage, according to a recent report by the Commonwealth Fund, a non-partisan, independent healthcare research foundation. Medicaid expansion would also generate savings as Medicaid recipients with the highest costs – pregnant women and adults with disabilities – would convert to the new expansion, potentially saving the state of Florida $161.9 million in 2020 and $901.2 million over five years.

"Right now we are choosing to send our federal money to other states for their health care needs. Why is Tallahassee doing this? They say we shouldn't use taxpayer money to pay for health insurance. We doctors disagree," said Dr. Olveen Carrasquillo, MD, MPH, Professor of Medicine and Public Health Sciences Chief at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. "We need to expand Medicaid here. We need to provide health care to keep people healthy and working and productive members of society."

The Commonwealth Fund's 2019 Scorecard on State Health System Performance ranks Florida near the bottom on access and affordability, with the highest rate of uninsured adults, children without a medical home and preventable hospitalizations for adults ages 18-64.

"The situation is especially dire in Miami-Dade County, where one-fifth of people under the age of 65 have no health insurance," said Alison Yager, Director of

Policy Advocacy at FHJP. "Health disparities in our community have life or death consequences. For example, death rates due to both prostate cancer and diabetes are more than twice as high among non-Hispanic blacks as whites."

Since 2014, nearly 700 Floridians have died prematurely every year because the state has not expanded Medicaid. That means that in the past six years, over 4,000 lives have been lost across the state for lack of access to health care, according to state-level data based on a paper by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

"Health insurance helps people get medications and get health care so they can stay healthy, and keep working," said Dr. Michael A. Kolber, MD, PhD, Miami Center for Aids Research, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

People like Guliet Prince, a working mother of two, and Allison Holmes, a single mother of a disabled son, are trapped in the "coverage gap" – too poor to qualify for subsidized health care under the Affordable Care Act and not poor enough to receive Medicaid in Florida.

"Working poor people in Florida like me who have jobs in warehouses, stores or clean houses and hotels for a living, would all qualify for Medicaid if Florida expanded coverage," said Prince at the recent Day of Action event held at the Stephen P. Clark Government Center. "Not having access to health care and mental health services puts our lives at risk."

Medicaid expansion was created to address the high uninsured rates among low-income adults who don't have access to employer coverage and can't afford to buy private insurance. Those in the coverage gap have limited family income, live below the poverty line, and are employed in low-wage, part-time jobs or have unpredictable incomes.

"Medicaid expansion in Florida is the right thing to do," said Miami-Dade County Commissioner Daniela Levine Cava. "Too many families across Miami-Dade are struggling to make ends meet and are foregoing critical health care because they simply cannot afford it. This is a medical issue, a moral issue and an economic issue. We need Medicaid expansion in Florida now."

FHJP and Florida Policy Institute are part of the state-wide Medicaid Matters for Florida Coalition led by Florida Voices for Health. The Coalition called on the Florida State Legislature to expand Medicaid in Florida in a "Medicaid Day of Action," Jan. 28, 2020.

Report: Connecting the Dots: How Medicaid Expansion Impacts Public Health and Improves Health Equity in South Florida.
https://www.floridahealthjustice.org/connecting-the-dots.html