The Effects of Medicaid Expansion on Maternal Health Outcomes

In 2016, Montana implemented Medicaid expansion through the HELP Act. Today, 39 states have adopted Medicaid expansion, and an increasing body of research demonstrates that expansion has shown positive effects in numerous areas, including: increasing economic activity [1], reducing medical debt [1], reducing mortality [1], increasing access to care [2], increasing access to care in rural communities [3], and reducing the uninsured rate [2-5]. Notably, Medicaid expansion has had a positive impact on maternal health outcomes including providing pregnant women in the United States with affordable health care, decreasing preterm birth [6], and identifying and addressing adverse health conditions for mother and baby [7, 8].

Medicaid expansion helps recognize the importance of health care before, during, and after pregnancy, which promotes healthy pregnancies and healthy children. States that adopted Medicaid expansion significantly reduced the number of women of reproductive age that were uninsured by 40% between 2013 and 2018 [9] and reduced the uninsured rate quicker than non-expansion states [3, 8-10]. Health insurance can provide reproductive age women with improved access to medical care by reducing the patient and clinician financial burden associated with obtaining needed services [11].

Expanding Medicaid eligibility has been found to improve some measures of health for low-income women including increased healthcare utilization, better self-rated health, decreased avoidance of care because of cost, and decreased binge and heavy drinking [12]. Even if only a small percentage of reproductive age women become pregnant, women may enter pregnancy in better health because of increased coverage from Medicaid expansion [12].
Medicaid expansion for non-pregnant women can have a positive effect for any future children.

This has major implications for women's health and overall wellbeing [11], especially increased access to sexual and reproductive health care, coverage protections for family planning, maternity care, and other key services [9].

In fact, beyond improving women’s health, increased access to medical care through Medicaid expansion for non-pregnant women can have a positive effect for any future children [11], such as identifying and addressing adverse health conditions through preventative services during the preconception period, like diabetes [8], hypertension [8], sexually transmitted infections [8, 13], and cervical cancer [13]. Guaranteed access to consistent coverage is important for continuing to reduce high rates of maternal morbidity and death as well. Medicaid expansion has allowed many women to remain on Medicaid after giving birth [8], which has been associated with decreased rates of maternal and infant mortality in the postpartum period [14].

Continuing to support Medicaid expansion will improve maternal health outcomes and promote health equity in Montana.

References


