

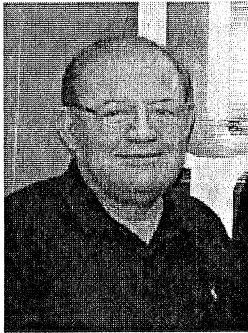
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## Hidalgo County passes resolution in support of Adult Medicaid

Last Updated: 26 February 2013

By Steve Taylor and Raul de la Cruz



**Hidalgo County Judge Ramon Garcia**

EDINBURG, February 26 - Hidalgo County Commissioners Court has become the first governmental entity in the Rio Grande Valley to pass a resolution in support of Medicaid to include coverage for adults.

The resolution, which was supported both by the RGV Equal Voice Network and Valley Interfaith, passed unanimously on Tuesday.

"We are very grateful county commissioners have supported this resolution to expand Medicaid, particularly since Hidalgo County has the highest rate of uninsured. Ann Williams Cass, chair of the RGV Equal Voice Network's health working group.

"This will allow the parents in a family of four that makes less than \$14 an hour to qualify for Medicaid coverage."

Cass said Hidalgo County needs healthy families and a healthy workforce. "This is opportunity to get over \$400 million a year in federal money for the first three years of Medicaid in Hidalgo County," she said.

Cass paid tribute to the work of Texas Well and Healthy, Center for Public Policy Priorities, the Children's Defense Fund. All three are supporting the expansion of Medicaid to include adults. "They have offered us so much help. They deserve credit for all the hard work they have done," Cass said.

Cass said Equal Voice will now be pushing Cameron County Commissioners Court and the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council to pass resolutions in support of Medicaid. Both entities are due to discuss passage of a resolution on Thursday.

Both Equal Voice and Valley Interfaith members were at Hidalgo County Commissioners Court to urge commissioners to pass a resolution in support of Adult Medicaid.

In a news release, Valley Interfaith said it urges other counties in the Valley to stand also in support. The Rev. Javier Leyva, a Valley Interfaith leader, pointed out that Medicaid would bring over \$400 million in Medicaid funds to Hidalgo County and nearly \$670 million to the Valley overall.

"If Texas expands Medicaid, people who make minimum wage would finally qualify, and many working people would benefit. This is an important for a healthy Rio Grande Valley," said Leyva.

Rosalie Tristan, a Valley Interfaith leader from Raymondville, agreed. "Expanding Medicaid would be incredibly beneficial for the Rio Grande Valley. More sick people would get treatment," she said.

Tristan pointed out that said support of Medicaid expansion will not raise the tax burden for residents of the state.

"American taxpayers already have funded the increased health insurance coverage, but it's the Governor's decision whether eligible Texans will be allowed access to Medicaid," Interfaith argued. "In addition, Texas hospitals desperately need this funding because they agreed to a reduction in indigent funding over time in exchange for Medicaid. Opting out will put an even greater burden on county taxpayers."



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Valley Interfaith issued a 'Fact Sheet' to push its case for Medicaid Expansion. The document states:

- Texas has the nation's highest percentage of uninsured children.
- Less than half of low-income adults in Texas have health insurance.
- Six million Texans are uninsured, more than the populations of Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio combined. There are 355,000 uninsured in the Rio C
- 1.1 million adults and 400,000 children would qualify for Medicaid expansion. (Texas is required to cover children under Medicaid, even if not extended to adults.)
- A Texan working full-time and earning minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour would qualify for Medicaid.
- A Texan who makes less than \$15,400 (or less than \$30,805 for family of four) would qualify.
- Opting out of expanding coverage won't reduce Texans' federal tax burden. (Tax dollars would go to other states instead.)
- Texas ranks next to last in state spending on Medicaid and last in mental health spending.

Last week, Valley Interfaith members joined other groups in the Industrial Areas Foundation for a rally on the north steps of the state Capitol in Austin. The rally was a statewide strategy to work with local counties to pass resolutions in support of Medicaid expansion. Over 30 state legislators and judges from Dallas, Bexar, and Travis County joined the rally.

Speaking at the rally, Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff, a former state representative and senator, said state lawmakers know what the right thing to do is. "It is a moral effort and it is an economic issue. With those two issues we should get broad-based support," Wolff said.

Wolff pointed out that 30 percent of those living in Bexar County lack health insurance. He said of the 55,000 people getting healthcare assistance through Bexar County's Health Care District would be moved to Medicaid under the expansion plans. He said these are working people who cannot get private health insurance because it is too high.

Wolff said an expansion of Medicaid would save Bexar County taxpayers \$52 million and allow county commissioners to cut the tax rate. He also said it is unfair for businesses to be paying for health insurance when Medicaid could step in. "We have every reason in the world to accept these funds," Wolff said. Like Hidalgo County, Bexar County Commissioners Court will consider a Medicaid Expansion resolution today.

Already, El Paso, Dallas and Travis counties have passed resolutions in favor of expanding Medicaid. Harris and Tarrant counties are expected to follow suit soon. Cameron County Commissioners Court and the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council will consider a Medicaid Expansion resolution on Thursday.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) has crunched numbers based on Health and Human Services Commission data. It believes the four-county Valley would need an additional \$666,970,814 in additional funds, if Medicaid is expanded. The analysis can be found on the CPPP's Medicaid County Data Report.

"Hidalgo County alone would get \$404 million every year over the next four years in additional federal funds. It is a staggering amount," CPPP Associate Director Aimee told the Guardian.

Texas Impact and Methodist Healthcare Ministries commissioned former Texas Deputy Comptroller Billy Hamilton to analyze the impact of expanding Medicaid.

Hamilton's report says that under the best case scenario, with every eligible person enrolled in Medicaid, state Sen. Eddie Lucio's District 27 would get an additional \$100 million in federal funds between 2014 and 2017.

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"Both our report and Hamilton's report use HHSC numbers," Dunkelberg said. "Hamilton's report looks beyond direct Medicaid spending and considers all the other benefits. With those dollars flowing through the economy, Hamilton looks at how much additional tax revenue is generated at the county level, and the costs that are avoided."

*Editor's Note: Raul de la Cruz reported for this story from Edinburg. Steve Taylor reported for this story from Austin.*

Write [Steve Taylor](#) and [Raul de la Cruz](#)