Expand BadgerCare and Bring our Dollars Back Home

Posted on Mar 31, Posted by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31 Category Wisconsin



Sen. Smith writes about Gov. Evers' budget proposal to expand BadgerCare in our state. BadgerCare expansion ensures we're being smart by covering more people while returning our tax dollars back to Wisconsin.

MADISON - On March 23rd, we commemorated the eleventh anniversary of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) being signed into law. Since its passage, 2.6 million Wisconsinites with preexisting conditions have benefited from enhanced healthcare protections. This certainly is an anniversary to celebrate, but it also reminds us that we still have work to do to get more Wisconsinites covered.

Thanks to the ACA, the federal government has offered to return our own tax dollars back to Wisconsin if we expand BadgerCare, Wisconsin's Medicaid program. Unfortunately, it's been eleven years and we still haven't expanded BadgerCare. If Wisconsin expanded BadgerCare when the ACA first passed, Wisconsin taxpayers would have saved $2.1 billion. These savings could've been used to lower prescription drug costs, expand mental health services, improve pregnancy outcomes and more. Wisconsin is still being held back by leaders playing politics with people's healthcare.

If our own tax dollars can be returned right back to us, I suspect most people would consider it a no-brainer to accept. After all, why should we pay to expand health care access in other states– which is what we're doing now–before addressing our challenges here at home?

Governor Tony Evers' 2021-23 budget includes a proposal to expand BadgerCare in Wisconsin. In doing so, we'd be able to expand healthcare coverage to 90,900 more Wisconsinites while also saving our state $634 million. We know Wisconsin could draw in an additional $2 billion from the federal government since President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan, according to the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau. These savings could be reinvested back into new and existing healthcare programs serving residents across the state.

Medicaid ensures that Wisconsin residents have access to preventive and lifesaving healthcare. Current Medicaid programs–including IRIS, Family Care and SeniorCare–are available to help individuals living in poverty, people with disabilities and those who may be ineligible for Medicare. Medicaid provides prescription drug subsidies through SeniorCare. Medicaid helps cover screenings and treatment for breast and cervical cancer for women under the age of sixty-five. BadgerCare expansion would help more Wisconsinites by increasing reimbursements and building greater capacity of existing Medicaid programs.

We have an opportunity right in front of us to cover more Wisconsinites while also saving our state money. This would seem like an easy decision, right? After all, this is about bringing back our federal tax dollars to Wisconsin. The Republican Majority has a different idea. Speaker Robin Vos (R – Rochester) called Medicaid Expansion a "nonstarter" doubling down on Republicans' opposition.

Many politicians seem to believe healthcare is a privilege – as if the quality of care you receive should depend on how wealthy you are. Whether you believe healthcare is a right or a privilege, our federal tax dollars are still being sent to other states to pay for their programs when it should be coming back here.



Wisconsin is one of only twelve states that have refused to expand Medicaid. Recent reports suggest Wyoming, Alabama and Texas are stepping closer to final passage. We're paying for these states to expand Medicaid without taking care of residents here in Wisconsin.

We need Medicaid because of our current healthcare system that predicates profit over public health. With a broken healthcare system driven by insurance companies and big pharmaceutical corporations, the most humane thing we can do as a society is ensure that all Americans have access to affordable, high-quality health care. BadgerCare expansion ensures we're being smart by returning our dollars to lower the cost of Medicaid programs overall.

We can get this done, right here in Wisconsin, by expanding BadgerCare.

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