More New Jerseyans gaining health insurance coverage

By MICHAEL CATALANI
ASSOCIATED PRESS

TRENTON, N.J. — Gov. Chris Christie said Monday that more than 500,000 New Jersey residents now have health insurance coverage under Medicaid as part of the expansion under the Affordable Care Act.

The Republican governor’s announcement came during a statehouse news conference and as Republicans across the country, including GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump, campaigned for office under a banner of “repeal and replace” of the 2010 law.

Christie says 566,655 residents now have the coverage, bringing the number of insured residents under the state’s public health insurance program to 1.7 million.

He says contrary to “naysayers” of the expansion that it would raise costs, the average expenditure per beneficiary in New Jersey decreased from $9,690 in fiscal year 2014 to $8,940 in fiscal year 2015.

He also said the state’s share of expenditures dropped from 45 percent in 2014 to 39 percent in 2015.

The announcement comes as Trump has said he would end “Obamacare” and replace it with something better. A recent non-partisan analysis found that the expansion that it would make 18 million people uninsured.

The announcement did not accept federal cash to expand its program the money would just be spent in other states.

Christie said Monday that Medicaid expansion was just one part of the legislation and that Republicans have included in their own proposals.

He credited his decision to expand Medicaid with helping to insure more people, but he also criticized the federal government, which he said he did not trust and that future New Jersey governors should be able to evaluate the state’s partnerships with federal government if it makes financial sense.

“I am for Medicaid expansion. But I am not for Medicaid expansion at any price,” Christie said.

Christie opted three years ago to expand Medicaid despite Republican opposition to the health care law. At the time, Christie said he thought the law was not right for the country or the state, but that if New Jersey did not accept federal cash to expand its program the money would just be spent in other states.

The expansion allowed adults without children and an income of up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level to apply for coverage.

Linda Schwimmer, the president of nonpartisan, nonprofit New Jersey Health Care Quality Initiative, said the announcement did not come as a surprise to the health care community.

She called the expansion the “right decision” for the state, but said that it’s likely the falling number of uninsured could plateau because the federal government’s reimbursement will begin to taper from 100 percent coverage to as low as 90 percent.

Physicians Health Plan to stop offering individual coverage

FORT WAYNE, Ind. (AP) — Another health insurance company says it’s leaving the Affordable Care Act marketplace in Indiana for 2017, reducing competition and forcing more than 6,000 customers to switch to other coverage.

Physicians Health Plan of Northern Indiana announced its departure Tuesday, calling it a business decision to avoid “millions of dollars in losses.”

The nonprofit will continue to sell small group plans, but is dropping all its individual products, both on and off the exchange.

The (Fort Wayne) Journal Gazette reports the company’s exit leaves four insurers offering individual policies through HealthCare.gov in the Fort Wayne area. Earlier, UnitedHealthcare announced it would leave.

Major insurers have pulled out of many state exchanges over rising costs. Federal officials have said they’re confident consumers will continue to find affordable options.

Open access endoscopy a viable option

Open-access endoscopy allows healthy patients the opportunity to have a screening colonoscopy scheduled at Bristol Hospital directly through their primary care physician or by self-referral.

Open-access endoscopy is appropriate when relatively healthy patients need a screening colonoscopy without having to make an appointment to see an office-based gastrointestinal specialist. Patients can simply discuss the procedure with their primary care physician and request to be scheduled for a screening colonoscopy, or contact the center to request open access without a physician’s referral. If the patient is a candidate for the program, the appointment will be scheduled immediately.

Patients can have their colonoscopy scheduled at Bristol Hospital’s Center for Surgery and Endoscopy; and they will not have to worry about missing time from work to see a consulting endoscopist. Patients will also only need to pay for one office co-pay.

Some of criteria for patients who are interested in an open access endoscopy include:

• Age 50 – 70 (age 40-49 if you have a first degree relative with colon cancer at age 50 or younger)
• No gastrointestinal symptoms — see your primary care physician if you have any questions
• No previous problems with anesthesia or sedation
• No heart disease or heart murmurs
• No uncontrolled endocrine disease such as uncontrolled diabetes
• No uncontrolled psychiatric disease including alcohol or drug abuse

Endoscopy services at Bristol Hospital are offered in our state-of-the-art center. Patients benefit from the continuity of care and comfort associated with having patient registration, admitting, procedure rooms and a recovery area in one self-contained environment.

The Bristol Hospital Colon Health Project’s goal is to save lives of men and women by providing education and awareness. You may be eligible for financial assistance to undergo a colonoscopy through the Bristol Hospital Colon Health Project. For more information, call 860-585-3054.

Patricia Coppola is the director of perioperative services at Bristol Hospital. For more information about open-access endoscopy, call 860-585-3457 or visit bristolhospital.org.