

S.D. Medicaid Report Released

BY DIRK LAMMERS
Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS — A South Dakota task force says expanding Medicaid in the state would improve access to preventative care and lower mortality rates, but it would also overload doctors and nurses and limit the state's flexibility in expanding health coverage.

The 29-member Medicaid Opportunities and Challenges Task Force, appointed by Gov. Dennis Daugaard to investigate the pros and cons of expanding Medicaid in the state, issued its final report this week.

Under the Affordable Health Care Act, the federal government will cover the entire cost of a state's new Medicaid enrollees from

2014 through 2016 before the federal share begins to gradually drop to 90 percent.

The report said the financial impact of expanding Medicaid in South Dakota will be "considerable," jumping to \$36.8 million by 2020. The cost estimate includes the state share of 5 percent in 2017, 6 percent in 2018, 7 percent in 2019 and 10 percent in 2020 and beyond.

But expanding Medicaid would help the state leverage federal funds and provide financial relief for South Dakota hospitals dealing with uncompensated costs, the report said.

"This financial relief will have a positive impact on hospital employees, contractors and the larger business community that rely on the financial health of local hospitals," the report said.

"Other providers will also financially benefit from an increase in the number of insured citizens, although the actual impact will vary by provider."

The Legislature this year opted not to expand the federal-state program that covers the medical expenses of low-income people, but states can change their decision at any time.

Daugaard then assembled the task force to research the issue, gather input and complete a report that outlines the advantages and disadvantages of an expansion. The panel made up of lawmakers, doctors, behavioral health providers, dentists, community health providers, hospital officials and state workers was not asked to recommend whether South Dakota should expand Medicaid.

The report included several recommendations, if the state were to expand Medicaid. Among them: terminating the program if federal funding drops below 90 percent, creating financial incentives to keep people healthy and monitoring the quality of care.

The task force also evaluated arguments related to the issues of equity and fairness resulting primarily from the unintended consequences of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision making Medicaid expansion optional for states. The report noted that expanding Medicaid is the only way to ensure that individuals below 100 percent of the federal poverty level will receive subsidized health insurance.

Floodwaters Flow Into W. Neb.

BY JOSH FUNK
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Floodwaters from Colorado quickly filled the South Platte River in western Nebraska Wednesday and began to spill out onto the rural land nearby.

Flooding is expected to continue as the surge moves east down the South Platte and into the larger Platte River over the next several days.

But much of the land at risk initially is pasture or cropland with little development, and the cities along the river for at least the first 75 miles don't sit directly on the South Platte, so officials are optimistic.

"We're hoping that the cities in the area will be OK," National Weather Service meteorologist Jessica Brooks said.

In neighboring Colorado, roughly 200 people remained missing Wednesday after devastating floods that killed at least eight people and destroyed more than 7,200 homes and businesses.

Most of the area around the South Platte remains in a severe drought, but it's not clear if the dry land surrounding the river will be able to absorb much of the floodwater.

"The water is still coming at a fairly

fast clip, so it's not like it has a lot of time to soak in," Brooks said.

The National Weather Service predicts the South Platte will rise quickly.

For instance, the river measured 1.6 feet deep near Roscoe Wednesday morning. By Thursday afternoon, it's expected to reach 12.5 feet deep — shattering the old record of 11.3 feet.

A new record was already set in Julesburg, Colo., on Wednesday when the river reached 10.7 feet, up from about 2 feet earlier this week.

In North Platte, the river is expected to rise from the current 5.3 feet to 13.9 feet on Saturday. Officials expect some neighborhoods and a golf course in southwest North Platte to experience flooding.

Region 21 Emergency Manager Ron Leal said it feels strange to be dealing with flooding now after spending the summer worrying about the drought.

"We were gearing up for all the wildfires that didn't happen and now this," said Leal, who oversees preparations in Deuel County, on the border with Colorado.

Leal said he thinks Big Springs will be well protected from floodwaters because Union Pacific tracks and a couple of culverts stand between the city and the river.

But officials evacuated a Big Springs truck stop Wednesday afternoon and closed the main road into the city from the interstate as floodwaters encroached.

Union Pacific spokesman Mark Davis said the railroad raised seven miles of track near Ogallala by several inches and piled rock along tracks between Julesburg, Colo., and Big Springs, Neb. to protect the line that sees 50 trains a day.

Even if the floodwaters remain mostly in rural areas, officials warned that the water could be carrying contaminants that could cause problems if they get into drinking water wells or water treatment systems.

Cities in the area have built sandbag walls around wastewater treatment plans, and officials are warning private well owners to monitor water quality and take steps to protect their drinking water by taking a well out of service and sealing it off until after the flooding is needed.

Downstream of North Platte, the Weather Service predicts minor flooding when the water reaches Cozad, Kearney and Grand Island early next week, but that forecast may change as the floodwater gets closer.

MTI Opens Trades Center In Mitchell

MITCHELL (AP) — Mitchell Technical Institute has opened an \$18.5 million Trades Center, completing a consolidation of the Mitchell campus.

A ribbon-cutting and open house was held Tuesday for the Trades Center, a 150,000-square-foot, two-story building that houses nine programs. With its completion, the school is now situated entirely south of Interstate 90, *The Daily Republic* newspaper reported.

"It truly is our new home," MTI President Greg Von Wald said.

In 2001, ground was broken on the first new MTI building south of the interstate — the Technology Center, located about 2 1/2 miles from MTI's original campus near Mitchell High School. It was the first step in a moving process that took 12 years and saw the construction of six buildings at a total cost of \$46.4 million.

"More important than its size or the money we put into it, is that it's a realization of a dream," Von Wald said.

A record 1,227 students are enrolled at the school this fall. The private, nonprofit MTI Foundation on Tuesday announced it has embarked on a \$4 million fundraising campaign and that more than half the money already has been raised.

The money will be used to support MTI's academic programs through lab equipment upgrades, technology-based teaching aids and increased faculty support, Foundation President Scott Paulson said. It also will be used to increase the number and size of scholarships for students.

"We're raising funds to educate students so they can return to local communities and embark on successful technical careers," Paulson said.

Suspect In Lockdown Wanted For Arson

ELK POINT. (AP) — Authorities in the southeast South Dakota city of Elk Point say an arson suspect with ties to some students prompted them to lock down the building for a couple of hours.

Elk Point-Jefferson School was put on lockdown around 8:45 a.m. Wednesday as a precaution after a house fire was intentionally set. Authorities say the suspect has family ties to students at the school.

Police Chief Ryan Fleek and school Superintendent Brian Shanks say students were not under any immediate danger and classes were held as normal.

The suspect, 32-year-old Scott Allen Hughes, of rural Elk Point, was arrested in Akron, Iowa, a couple of hours later. He's awaiting extradition back to South Dakota.

Former Nebraska Clerk Charged

FAIRFIELD, Neb. (AP) — A former south-central Nebraska city clerk has been criminally charged, accused of stealing more than \$100,000 from the city of Fairfield to buy everything from a cruise vacation to spa supplies.

The Hastings Tribune reports former Fairfield City Clerk Jennifer Bassett is charged in Clay County District Court with two counts of theft.

Court and arrest records say that 38-year-old Bassett used a credit card issued to the city in her name to pay for personal items and services. Records also say Bassett overpaid herself and overcompensated herself for health insurance premiums. Her arraignment is set for Oct. 9.

Man Arrested In Connection With Death

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The Douglas County Sheriff's Office says a man believed to have helped commit one of four linked Omaha killings last month has been arrested.

The Douglas County Sheriff's office says Warren J. Levering was arrested Wednesday on the Winnebago Indian Reservation in northeast Nebraska. Authorities had issued an arrest warrant for the 51-year-old Levering a day earlier.

Levering is accused of being an accessory to a felony in the Aug. 21 death of 33-year-old Andrea Kruger, who was shot and killed in an intersection northwest of Omaha as she was headed home from work.

Prosecutors have charged 26-year-old Nikko Jenkins, who is Levering's nephew, with four counts of murder in connection with Kruger's death and three other killings.

Store Settles With Fired Employee

RAPID CITY (AP) — A Rapid City grocery store has settled with an employee who claimed she was fired for being a transgender.

Cori McCreery says she was fired in 2010 from Don's Valley Market after she announced she was transitioning from being a man to being a woman. McCreery had worked at the store on and off for five years and at one point had held a supervisory position.

McCreery filed a discrimination complaint and the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission investigated. The EEOC says the store has agreed to pay McCreery \$50,000 and apologize to her.

The store also must develop an anti-discrimination policy and provide anti-discrimination training annually for employees.

Groups Promote Insurance Marketplace

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Health care advocates launched a new campaign Wednesday to help Nebraska residents get insurance coverage under the federal health care law.

A new group, "Enroll Nebraska," has formed to show residents how they can enroll through the new health insurance marketplace, which opens on Oct. 1.

Community health groups throughout the state have been hiring and training insurance "navigators," to help guide residents through the process. The marketplaces

allow consumers to comparison shop for health insurance and see whether they qualify for federal subsidies.

"This is a historic opportunity to ensure thousands of people gain much-needed access to health care coverage in our state, understand their health care options and get help to pay for coverage," said state Sen. Jeremy Nordquist, of Omaha.

Health care groups plan to speak about the enrollment process this week in Scottsbluff, Grand Island and Lincoln.

Two Nebraska groups have received federal grants to help hire and train the

insurance navigators: Community Action of Nebraska, a nonprofit that has offices throughout the state, and the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska, which will offer services primarily to American Indians.

Community Action of Nebraska is training 52 navigators and plans to have 62 in place once the marketplaces open. The agency's goal is to bring some 42,000 uninsured residents into the marketplaces.

The navigators-in-training include case managers who already work for the nonprofit agency, in addition to new staff members hired in local offices. They receive 20 hours of training then must

pass an exam and register with the Nebraska Department of Insurance.

The Ponca Tribe's service area includes more than 14,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives, including about 4,500 who are uninsured. Those residents are scattered in 12 counties in Nebraska, two in Iowa and one in South Dakota.

The work isn't new for local agencies because many already work with residents who will directly benefit from the law, said Karen Watson, the interim executive director of the Omaha-based Eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership.

Tanks

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have the tanks gone and create some green space. Into the future, the site will provide opportunities for possible improvements that could include commercial and residential components developed with a public-private partnership.

Acquisition of the land was the top priority among the recommendations offered to the City Commission by the Meridian Bridge Plaza Committee for future development of the area.

"The committee's vision for the space is to have it be multi-functional and multi-seasonal," committee member Lisa Scheve told the *Press & Dakotan*. "We would like it to be used not just during the summer months should a splash pad be added but also during additional seasons throughout the year. The possibilities for the space are endless. It's a huge success for us to be able to work with the existing landowner to redevelop that piece of property to take away some of the industrial look and be more pedestrian friendly."

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net/.

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Rapid City Council Chambers To Get Security Boost

RAPID CITY (AP) — Recent indirect threats against a Rapid City Council member and a city employee have prompted a security upgrade for the City Council chambers.

A person with mental health issues recently made the indirect threats because he was upset with the council, and the email threats mentioned weapons, Assistant

Police Chief Karl Jegeris said.

Authorities intervened and, with the help of others, managed to arrange mental health treatment for the person. Jegeris said the incident prompted authorities to examine security in the council chambers.

"This room has existed as it is for more than 25 years," he said. "A lot of things have

changed in our society."

Recommended improvements include a half wall with a gate that would separate the public seating area from the dais. The presence of the barrier would be an indirect signal to members of the public that they should not approach without approval, Jegeris said.



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— Bill Bethel

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