

Contact:

Mary Kay Clunies-Ross, (WSHA) 206/216-2894 or 206/817-4845

Susan Ward (for CHNW) 206/786-0094

Jason Erskine (AARP) 206-517-9345

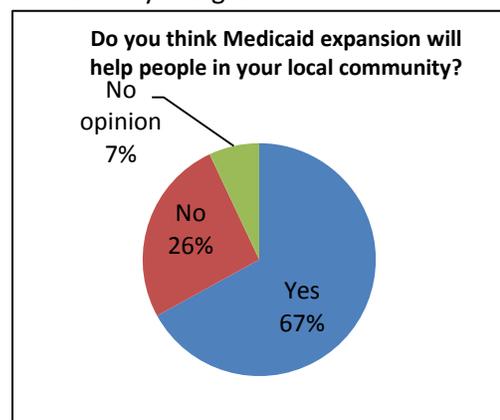
### **Two-Thirds Washington Residents Support Medicaid Expansion**

*Strong support for legislative action that would expand federally funded health coverage*

Two-thirds of Washington state residents support the expansion of Medicaid in Washington State, believing that it will help people in their communities, according to a recent poll conducted by Stuart Elway of more than 400 Washington residents.

Washington State legislators must decide this legislative session whether to accept millions of dollars in federal funds to expand Medicaid coverage to residents who are currently without health coverage. This expansion of coverage will allow the state to save approximately \$225 million in the first two years, and provide health care to hundreds of thousands residents who are currently living without it.

"Most people know someone who is uninsured in our state, so we're not surprised that people are supportive of expanding health coverage to more Washingtonians," said Molly Belozer Firth, Director of Public Policy for the Community Health Network of Washington (CHNW). "Community health centers are committed to Medicaid expansion and expect that 170,000 of the uninsured patients we are currently serving will be eligible for Medicaid under the expansion. It is a clear choice for our state to save lives and money."



Research has shown that Medicaid coverage can make immediate improvements to people's physical and mental health, and general well-being. Washington State currently has about a million uninsured people, many of whom are working at jobs that do not offer health insurance. Without insurance, these people have a greater risk of prolonged illnesses, disability, and death.

"The recession drove many of our neighbors into unemployment and under-employment," said Ingrid McDonald, Advocacy Director of AARP. "It was especially hard on workers over 50, who are struggling to get back into the labor market and face high premiums for individual insurance. The Medicaid expansion will allow them to be healthy when they reenter the job market, and healthier when they qualify for Medicare. It makes sound financial sense to expand Medicaid now."

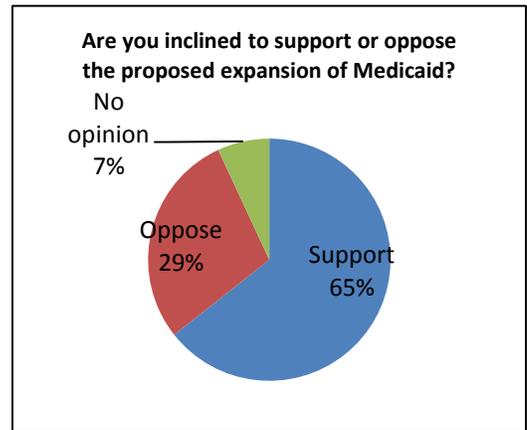
The expansion of Medicaid will allow very-low income adults to get preventive and emergency care. Single adults earning up to \$16,000 a year and families of three earning up to \$27,000 a year will qualify.

"All day, every day, there are patients in our Emergency Departments who are unnecessarily suffering from completely treatable and manageable conditions," said Cassie Sauer, Senior Vice President for Advocacy and Government Affairs at the Washington State Hospital Association. "Because they don't have a primary care doctor or any other regular access to health care, they are losing years of their lives to manageable diseases like diabetes and asthma. And people with untreated infectious diseases such as the flu are putting the entire community at risk. It's the smart thing to do, and it's the right thing to do."

*(Continued)*

Other findings from the poll:

- 63% of residents believe that the Legislature should expand Medicaid to cover more low-income uninsured people with new federal money;
- 68% of state residents agree that the fact that Medicaid will connect working adults with health care is a good reason to expand Medicaid;
- 63% of residents believe that saving the state more than \$200 million in the first two years is a good reason to expand Medicaid.



### About the Poll

The questions, written and funded by the Washington State Hospital Association, were included in The Elway Poll. The survey was taken on January 24-27, among 407 heads of household from the registered voter list, and had a margin of error of  $\pm 4.5\%$ . The polling sample was balanced for gender (49% male, 51% female) and geography (King County, 28%, Western Washington, 52%, and Eastern Washington, 20%).

**See page 3 of this release for all the questions and results. Answers may not add up to 100% due to rounding.**

1. About 1 million people in our state do not have health insurance. As you may know, Medicaid is a national health care program, run by the state, that provides health care services to very low income people. The Washington State Legislature is considering expanding Medicaid coverage to more people in our state. Do you think that expanding Medicaid would help people in your local community?

**67% YES**  
**26% NO**  
**7% NO OPIN**

2. The expansion of Medicaid would provide health care coverage to about 325,000 Washington adults who have an annual income below \$16,000. Many people in our state are working at low-pay or part-time jobs without health insurance, and don't get the health care they need. Medicaid expansion will connect them with a doctor and regular check-ups to keep them healthy. In your opinion, is that a good reason or not a reason to expand Medicaid here? Or does it make no difference in your opinion.

**68% GOOD REASON**  
**19% NOT A REASON**  
**12% NO DIFFERENCE**  
**1% NO OPIN**

3. The federal government will pay the entire cost of Medicaid expansion for the first few years. After that, the federal government will pay 90 percent and state would pay 10 percent of the cost of expansion. Each state may choose whether or not to participate in this expansion. Given this, what do you think Washington State should do?

**32% Keep Medicaid as it is today, with no new funding from the federal government and no more people getting health insurance.**  
**63% Expand Medicaid to cover more low-income uninsured people, using the new federal money.**  
**5% NO OPIN**

4. Because the federal government is providing funds for Medicaid expansion to all states, if Washington does not expand Medicaid, those federal dollars will go other states.

In your opinion, is that a good reason or not a reason to expand Medicaid here? Or does it make no difference in your opinion.

**52% GOOD REASON**  
**32% NOT A REASON**  
**15% NO DIFFERENCE**  
**2% NO OPIN**

5. As you may know, Washington funds its own health care program for low-income residents, called the Basic Health Plan. Expanding Medicaid would allow the federal government to pay the cost of insurance for people who are now in the Basic Health Plan. This would save our state more than \$200 million in just two years. In your opinion, is that a good reason or not a reason to expand Medicaid here? Or does it make no difference in your opinion.

**63% GOOD REASON**  
**21% NOT A REASON**  
**14% NO DIFFERENCE**  
**2% NO OPIN**

6. Given all that you have just heard, are you inclined to support or oppose this proposed expansion of Medicaid:

**65% SUPPORT**  
**29% OPPOSE**  
**7% NO OPIN**