

FOCUS GROUP INSIGHTS

MISSOURIANS' VIEWS ON MEDICAID EXPANSION

May 20, 2020

PERRYUNDEM

+ **gmmb**
cause the effect





I want them to expand [Medicaid]. I am the only one in my family without [insurance]. We are so close but can't qualify.

Woman from Springfield

If it's going to bring in tax money and jobs – and more people have insurance – why wouldn't you do it?

Man from Kansas City

I hope our reason to expand [Medicaid] is bigger than COVID-19... we need to be thinking longer term.

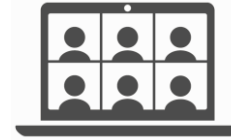
Woman from Rural Missouri

I'm worried about how we are going to pay for it... and adding to the deficit.

Man from Springfield



BACKGROUND



PerryUndem and GMMB held five online Zoom focus groups with Missouri residents to understand their feelings about expanding the Medicaid program.

One focus group each was held with residents in the St. Louis area (5/12), Kansas City area (5/14), Springfield area (5/14), Cape Girardeau and Southern Missouri area (5/15) and rural areas throughout the state (5/15).

The majority of the residents participating in this study identified as “conflicted” about Medicaid expansion. There was a mix of gender, race, and income across the groups. About seven or eight of the participants are currently uninsured, while most others have private insurance.

The study was sponsored by the Missouri Foundation for Health.

SUMMARY



FEELINGS ABOUT MEDICAID, EXPANSION

Most know little about the Medicaid program or **MOHealthNet**. About one-third had heard about expansion, but most had not.

All are surprised how low current Medicaid eligibility is for non-disabled adults in Missouri. They assumed the income limit was much higher. This is important information to get out to Missouri residents.

The high unemployment rate during COVID-19 is a reason many lean in favor of expansion initially. Also, they just feel current eligibility levels are too low.

There is some confusion, however, about whether the current effort to expand Medicaid is related to COVID-19 or not. **One or two of the messages likely fed this confusion.**

SUMMARY



FEELINGS ABOUT MEDICAID, EXPANSION (CONT'D)

They have mixed feelings about the Governor. Many feel he has not been authoritative enough in his handling of COVID-19. But his opinion on Medicaid expansion will matter – he is viewed as an expert on the budget.

They want to learn the details of expansion to feel fully comfortable with it, namely: the new eligibility level (\$17,600 for an individual, which many feel is still too low) and the impact on the state budget.

Even though most support expansion by the end of the focus groups, about one-third still have reservations. They are worried about how to pay for it and fear the state will take money from other programs. Some are also worried about adding to the growing federal **and state budget** deficits.

SUMMARY



How you communicate about Medicaid expansion will matter. Following are insights about how to discuss this issue:

WHAT WORKS

- Giving a few key facts (but not too many).
- Using a pragmatic, sensible tone.
- Explaining how low current Medicaid eligibility levels are (\$5,800 for parents in a family of four).
- Providing the amount that individuals could earn under expansion (\$17,600).
- Making clear the federal government will pay 90% of the costs.
- Giving details about economic benefits of expansion (e.g., how much money will be brought into the state, number of jobs created).
- Referring to Medicaid as “temporary help.”
- Using messengers with authority and experience with Medicaid (doctors and nurses are particularly good).

WHAT DOESN'T

- Using a political or biased tone.
- Assuming people know a lot about Medicaid or have heard about the ballot initiative.
- Telling Missourians that 37 other states have already expanded (“Missouri is unique!”).
- Avoiding discussing costs – they want to know how expansion will be paid for.
- Just focusing on low-income individuals or those who lost jobs. Missourians with stable jobs and insurance also want to know how they will benefit.
- Relying on just one messenger – Missourians want to hear multiple voices on this issue (including the Governor’s).

SUMMARY



Four messages emerge as the strongest. The “temporary help” message focuses on helping Missourians who have lost jobs during COVID-19 and small businesses. It explains that Medicaid is there for Missourians in times of crisis – which resonated strongly with many.

The “public health” message was a surprise, but Missourians have health care on their minds during COVID-19 and want everyone to have access to care.

The “dollars” and “uncompensated care” messages work particularly well with more conflicted Missourians and begin to answer how expansion would be paid for and will benefit all Missourians.

TEMPORARY HELP FOR UNINSURED

More than 146,000 Missourians have filed for unemployment in the last two weeks as businesses close and workers lose jobs or have hours cut due to the economic fallout caused by COVID-19. Across Missouri, small business owners are suffering and people are struggling to pay bills and protect their families. Estimates report that workers who lose their jobs are also likely to lose health insurance that comes with it and as many as 200,000 more Missourians will be uninsured as a result of the pandemic. Medicaid provides temporary health insurance to help people in crisis – expanding Medicaid will ensure that more low-income individuals and parents can get health coverage they need to get them through these tough times.

GOOD FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

When people are uninsured, they are less likely to seek care if they’re sick. Ensuring people have access to affordable health insurance is always the right thing to do. But it’s a matter of life and death during COVID-19. We must ensure all Missourians feel confident they can seek and afford care to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 or future health crisis. By expanding Medicaid to more low-income individuals and parents, we help them get care when they’re sick and keep our communities safer and stronger in the process.

DOLLARS TO STATE / STATE BUDGET

Medicaid expansion would bring our hard-earned tax dollars back to Missouri. Those dollars could provide health care to more than 300,000 of our residents, create thousands of new jobs, and help to keep more of our rural hospitals open. The federal government would cover 90% of the costs of covering newly-insured residents. This would bring much-needed federal funding into our state and free up dollars in our state budget to cover other priority areas that have been hard hit by COVID-19.

UNCOMPENSATED CARE

Currently, our state pays for health care in inefficient ways. When a Missourian without health insurance goes to the emergency room, that hospital bill usually gets paid by state and local taxes – which means higher insurance premiums. If we expand Medicaid in Missouri, more people would have access to affordable care across our state, keeping health care costs down for everyone.

SUMMARY



Most find Tila Hubrecht's arguments more compelling!



Most focus group participants agree with the opinions of Tila Hubrecht, a former state lawmaker who supports Medicaid expansion, rather than the views of Governor Parson (who opposes it).

Most feel she makes good points about how Medicaid expansion can help rural areas and bring money into the state. "I liked that she is addressing an issue my neighbors don't understand... they only think of the big cities when they think about who uses Medicaid. But rural people use it too," said a rural Missouri resident.



I don't think it's the time to be expanding anything in the state of Missouri right now. There's absolutely not going to be any extra money whatsoever.

Governor Mike Parson



The Missouri Times
Opinion: The conservative case for Medicaid expansion in Missouri
BY TILA HUBRECHT ON MAY 14, 2020

As a rural conservative, lifelong Republican, and former state lawmaker, I want to share a conclusion that's become increasingly apparent not just to me but also to my friends, family, and neighbors back home in southeast Missouri.

With a statewide initiative headed for inclusion on the November general election ballot, it's past time for Missouri to expand its income eligibility rules and allow more working Missourians to receive Medicaid.

It is not a decision I have come to lightly.

But after working for decades as a registered nurse, and after watching members of my own family continue to struggle to get the basic medical care they need, I've come to a decision that may sound odd coming from a rural Republican like me — but which also makes fiscal as well as moral sense.

Across our state, hundreds of thousands of hardworking Missourians with jobs that don't provide health insurance find themselves trapped in the coverage gap. These workers earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but can't possibly make enough to be able to purchase private health insurance.

Expanding Medicaid will provide health care coverage to more than 230,000 Missourians. Many of these people are self-employed or work for small farms and businesses that can't provide group health insurance.

But people still get sick, still need treatments and therapies, and still need care. Expanding eligibility gives working people who earn less than \$18,000 a year access to lifesaving medical care.

Rather than cost the state money, Medicaid expansion could save Missouri more than \$1 billion annually, according to both a state summary and academic research, by bringing our tax dollars home.

Right now, we're shipping our money off to Washington instead of investing it in our state. It's getting spent in places like California to pay for their healthcare and help their economy. That just doesn't make any sense — especially at a time when Missourians desperately need healthcare and jobs.

SUMMARY



The ad concept to the right is the strongest. It was ~~only~~ tested in the final two sites but includes all the facts that focus group participants found strongest. It also addresses some of the financial concerns of the most conflicted participants.

MEDICAID EXPANSION MAKES SENSE

Right now in Missouri, a parent in a family of four must earn \$5,800 or less annually to qualify for Medicaid health insurance. That means there are 300,000 residents across our state who make too much to qualify — but not enough to afford health coverage on their own. By expanding Medicaid, someone who makes up to \$17,800 annually would be covered. Expansion would also bring our taxpayer dollars back to Missouri, save \$39 million in our state budget, create more than 15,000 jobs, and keep rural hospitals open. No matter how you look at it, Medicaid expansion for Missouri just makes sense.

SUMMARY



Focus group participants said they want to hear about Medicaid expansion from those who make the decisions or have direct experience with Medicaid. They are wary of those with an agenda, **those who could profit** or **have** bias on this issue.



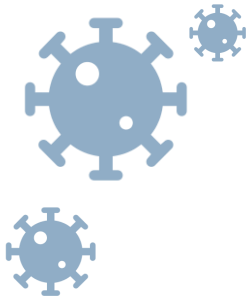
In two focus groups, we tested a quote from a Chamber of Commerce member about the financial benefits of Medicaid expansion. Participants found this to be a very strong counter to the Governor's claims that the state cannot afford to expand.

Top People They Want to Hear from (in order):

- Todd Richardson, director of MO HealthNet, which runs Missouri's Medicaid program
- Randall Williams, MD, Director of Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
- Governor Mike Parson
- Herb Kuhn, President and CEO of the Missouri Hospital Association
- Patrick Geschwind, the interim chief executive for the Pemiscot hospital system, located in one of the poorest counties in Missouri
- Doctors and nurses
- Hospital administrators
- Someone in the coverage gap

DETAILED INSIGHTS





COVID-19

Everyone is experiencing a new normal. Some have lost jobs and are struggling financially. A few have been unable to be with older family members.

They talk about an emotional toll – depression, anxiety, tension with loved ones, and isolation.

But many also say they are coping just fine and feel more connected with family and neighbors.

“We live in a trailer park.. There are 140 units and 69 of them have lost jobs.”

Woman from Rural MO

“It’s emotionally hard as it is financially hard.”

Woman from Springfield

“The school lunches have helped. I have been to the food banks. It’s been tight but we are managing.”

Woman from Springfield

“I feel like I have to take on the weight [of my students’] emotions.”

Teacher from Kansas City

“We can’t go to funerals.”

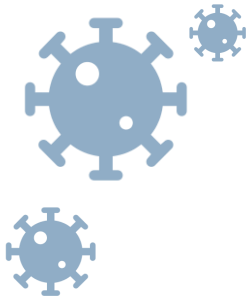
Man from St Louis.

“I haven’t seen my mom [who has dementia] for two months. They are on lock down.”

Woman from St. Louis

“Everyone seems more friendly now.”

Woman from Cape Girardeau/SO MO



COVID-19

Most received – and are thankful for – the stimulus check from the federal government.

Some are receiving unemployment (and it is making a big difference), but a few others have faced difficulty getting it.

Many feel the federal government should provide more help to Missourians to get through this crisis.

They give the state response to COVID-19 mixed reviews. Some are confused by the different approaches to opening the state up.

“[The stimulus check] was helpful. My husband only worked one day this week and the paycheck was \$42.”

Woman from Springfield

“It paid my rent.”

Woman from Cape Girardeau/SO MO

“Some people are making more on unemployment than they did when they were working.”

Woman from Cape Girardeau/SO MO

“[The Governor] is not authoritative enough. He just tip toes around things.”

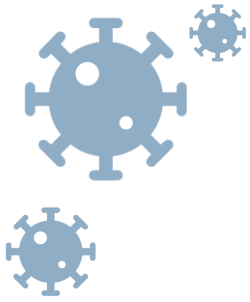
Woman from Springfield

“Wish we weren’t opening up so quickly... we should wait for other states first... don’t want a spike.”

Man from St. Louis

“[The Governor] is just passing the buck to the mayors and county governments.”

Man from Kansas City



COVID-19

There are mixed feelings about long-term impacts on their communities. Some feel the economic impacts will linger a long time and that many businesses will not come back.

But more seem to think life will return close to normal in a few months. They say they have few – if any – COVID cases in their area.

One participant mentioned disparities in who is being impacted by COVID-19. She noted that people of color are more likely to have conditions that make them vulnerable and more likely to be uninsured. She feels programs like Medicaid are important for health equity.

“I know some people who think this whole thing is a hoax pushed by the media.”

Man from Kansas City

“It’s no worse than the flu.”

Woman from Cape Girardeau/SO MO

“Many people are doomed... they are finished. They won’t be able to reopen their businesses.”

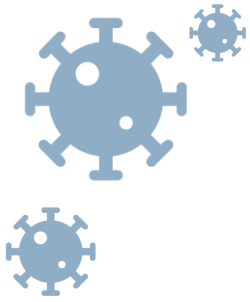
Woman from Springfield

“[Businesses] will open... it won’t be the same, but it will be close.”

Man from Springfield

“I am seeing the disparity of poor black people dying from COVID... so whatever we need to do to get people access to health care.”

Woman in St. Louis



COVID-19

Some have heard hospitals are struggling. They have been told of furloughs and empty beds.

Many have been putting off health care themselves for safety reasons. Some have tried to make appointments to address chronic conditions but have been unable to. A handful have experienced telehealth and feel it went okay.

Two with cancer mention being worried that they've missed their regular check-in visits.

“Mercy [hospital] has been laying off people. They didn't get the people they expected.”

Man from Springfield

“Friends [at hospitals] are being furloughed, no one is coming into the hospitals... only emergency rooms.”

Woman from Springfield

“If our hospital closed, it would be a 45-minute drive.”

Woman from Rural MO

“I am afraid to go to the hospital. I would have to be there alone, without family.”

Woman from Kansas City

“My husband tried to get an appointment, but they wouldn't let him.”

Woman from Kansas City

“I have cancer and the spots on my lung have not been checked.”

Woman from Springfield



MEDICAID EXPANSION

Most participants know little about Medicaid or **MOHealthNet**. None know that most adults **ages** 19 to 64 in Missouri cannot qualify.

It is important to tell participants that the current Medicaid income threshold for parents in a family of four is less than \$5,800 a year for a family of four. They find this amount shockingly low. Many feel the increase to 138% FPL (or \$17,600 for an individual) was still too low.

About one third have heard of Medicaid expansion before. A similar number have heard this issue is going to be on the ballot in November.

While they mostly support the ballot initiative, a few have concerns. They worry people won't be informed and will be confused when they get in the ballot box.

“I didn't know the [Medicaid threshold] was so low... surprisingly low. There is not a job that pays that low.”

Man from St. Louis

“I would have assumed [Medicaid eligibility] was more like \$18K or so... near the poverty level.”

Man from St. Louis

“We have a bad history of the state ignoring ballot results.”

Woman from Rural MO

“I'm worried people won't be educated enough about the issue [when they have to vote for it on the ballot].”

Woman from Cape Girardeau/SO MO



MEDICAID EXPANSION

Even before messages, the majority lean in favor of expansion. They feel current eligibility limits are too strict and that many people are losing jobs and could use affordable health coverage. Those who are currently uninsured are strongly in favor.

Those leaning against want to know how it will be paid for, are concerned money will be taken from other budget areas and worry about adding to the federal deficit.

“[We should expand] so that we can feel comfortable and not feel scared all of the time.”

Uninsured woman from Springfield

“It should be expanded. There are a lot of people losing jobs.”

Woman from Kansas City

“It has to work for everyone, not just low-income people.”

Woman from Kansas City

“If people have no other options... can’t get Obamacare... then there needs to be an option.”

Man from Kansas City

“People who are uninsured put off care. When I was uninsured, I didn’t go to the doctor.”

Woman from Kansas City

“Unemployment is like 20% right now... people need health care.”

Woman from St. Louis

“People need to feel safe... with the crisis we are in.”

Woman from St. Louis



MEDICAID EXPANSION

It is important to note that some participants mistakenly believe the expansion effort is directly related to COVID-19 and therefore temporary. This could have been a result of so much discussion at the beginning of the focus groups about the current pandemic.

But this is a warning about messaging during this time period. It may be important to clarify that Medicaid expansion is a long-term solution for the state – not a temporary fix for COVID-19.

“We should expand during the COVID but bring it back down afterwards.”

Woman from Cape Girardeau/SO MO

“I hope our reason to expand [Medicaid] is bigger than COVID-19... we need to be thinking longer term.”

Woman from Rural MO



MESSAGES

The messages tested well. None received lower than a 5.5 out of 7 rating, which is good for message testing. Their choice of best message was also fairly dispersed. This means there are many ways to talk about Medicaid expansion and you don't necessarily need to be tied to one message. Some observations...

- Messages that include a few key facts tested well.
- Focusing on those who are losing jobs right now and will need health coverage is effective.
- An empathetic public health message about the risks of people putting off care worked well for many. There may be more sympathy than usual for the uninsured.
- A message asserting Missouri is being left behind because 37 other states have already expanded gets high marks but was divisive when later discussed. Now might not be a good time to tell Missourians that they are “being left behind.”
- More conflicted participants respond well to economic-themed messages. They need to know how the state will pay for Medicaid expansion and to see details. Similarly, these conflicted participants want to know how they will benefit from expansion.



MESSAGES

Ratings for Strongest Messages

***TEMPORARY HELP FOR UNINSURED** More than 146,000 Missourians have filed for unemployment in the last two weeks as businesses close and workers lose jobs or have hours cut due to the economic fallout caused by COVID-19. Across Missouri, small business owners are suffering and people are struggling to pay bills and protect their families. Estimates report that workers who lose their jobs are also likely to lose health insurance that comes with it and as many as 200,000 more Missourians will be uninsured as a result of the pandemic. Medicaid provides temporary health insurance to help people in crisis -- expanding Medicaid will ensure that more low-income individuals and parents can get health coverage they need to get them through these tough times.

GOOD FOR PUBLIC HEALTH When people are uninsured, they are less likely to seek care if they're sick. Ensuring people have access to affordable health insurance is always the right thing to do. But it's a matter of life and death during COVID-19. We must ensure all Missourians feel confident they can seek and afford care to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 or future health crises. By expanding Medicaid to more low-income individuals and parents, we help them get care when they're sick and keep our communities safer and stronger in the process.

MO LEFT BEHIND Thirty-seven states, like Arkansas, Iowa, and Kentucky, have already expanded Medicaid—providing health insurance to low-income adults who don't get health coverage through their job or make enough to buy it on their own. These states have more people getting access to needed treatment and care, and are growing jobs as a result. Missouri is losing out. Especially in the midst of a public health emergency, it shouldn't matter where you live – having access to quality, affordable health care is essential. It's time for our state to protect its people too.

DOLLARS TO STATE / STATE BUDGET Medicaid expansion would bring our hard-earned tax dollars back to Missouri. Those dollars could provide health care to more than 300,000 of our residents, create thousands of new jobs, and help to keep more of our rural hospitals open. The federal government would cover 90% of the costs of covering newly-insured residents. This would bring much-needed federal funding into our state and free up dollars in our state budget to cover other priority areas that have been hard hit by COVID-19.

** This message was only tested in the final two groups and two participants who chose this message as best were unable to rate it. It is safe to assume the average score would have been higher.*

Ave. Rating 1-7	# Times Chosen as Best
5.5	5 out of 11
6.0	7 out of 29
5.8	4 out of 29
5.6	4 out of 29



MESSAGES

Ratings for Middle-Tier Messages

UNCOMPENSATED CARE Currently, our state pays for health care in inefficient ways. When a Missourian without health insurance goes to the emergency room, that hospital bill usually gets paid by state and local taxes – which means higher insurance premiums. If we expand Medicaid in Missouri, more people would have access to affordable care across our state, keeping health care costs down for everyone.

HELP LOW-WAGE WORKERS / FRONT LINE Missouri can act now to protect workers in our communities who are on the frontlines of responding to this crisis. Grocery store clerks, home healthcare workers, janitors and others are risking their health to keep us safe. Yet, many of these workers go without health insurance because they don't have benefits and can't afford a plan on their own. Expanding Medicaid to a Missourian who makes about \$17,000 annually or less would help protect those who are making it possible for us to live our lives and stay safe in these uncertain times.

RURAL HOSPITALS AND ACCESS TO CARE Nearly 40% of Missourians live in rural communities and with more than 10 rural hospital closures in the past year alone, we must do more to protect their health and well-being. Expanding Medicaid will keep rural hospitals and clinics open, providing critical care for so many families throughout our state.

SUPPORT DURING ECONOMIC FALLOUT Workers hardest hit by the economic fallout caused by COVID-19 are the least likely to have health insurance. Restaurant servers, retail clerks, home health care workers and others – the people that we rely on to keep Missouri running -- are suffering as businesses have closed and pay checks have stopped. Expanding Medicaid will ensure that more low-income individuals and parents can get health coverage to get them through these tough times and have one less thing to worry about.

Ave. Rating 1-7	# Time Chosen as Best
5.5	4 out of 29
5.7	2 out of 29
5.6	2 out of 29
6.1	1 out of 29



MESSAGES

The strongest message may be the one we tested in the final two focus groups.

Participants like the factual tone, that it empathizes with people losing their jobs (some participants in the focus groups are experiencing this) and describes Medicaid as “temporary help” (which is how they prefer to think about the program).



TEMPORARY HELP FOR UNINSURED

“More than 146,000 Missourians have filed for unemployment in the last two weeks as businesses close and workers lose jobs or have hours cut due to the economic fallout caused by COVID-19. Across Missouri, small business owners are suffering and people are struggling to pay bills and protect their families. Estimates report that workers who lose their jobs are also likely to lose health insurance that comes with it and as many as 200,000 more Missourians will be uninsured as a result of the pandemic. Medicaid provides temporary health insurance to help people in crisis – expanding Medicaid will ensure that more low-income individuals and parents can get health coverage they need to get them through these tough times.”



MESSAGES

A public health message also tested surprisingly well in many of the focus groups. Those participants who are uninsured tended to show a lot of support for this message because they can relate to putting off health care.

The focus on affordable health care may also have resonated with many.

Finally, the increased connectedness that many Missourians say they feel right now to each other could explain why this message tested so well.



GOOD FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

“When people are uninsured, they are less likely to seek care if they’re sick. Ensuring people have access to affordable health insurance is always the right thing to do. But it’s a matter of life and death during COVID-19. We must ensure all Missourians feel confident they can seek and afford care to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 or future health crisis. By expanding Medicaid to more low-income individuals and parents, we help them get care when they’re sick and keep our communities safer and stronger in the process.”



MESSAGES

Two messages resonated with more conflicted Missourians, who are concerned about the costs of expansion.



DOLLARS TO STATE / STATE BUDGET

“Medicaid expansion would bring our hard-earned tax dollars back to Missouri. Those dollars could provide health care to more than 300,000 of our residents, create thousands of new jobs, and help to keep more of our rural hospitals open. The federal government would cover 90% of the costs of covering newly-insured residents. This would bring much-needed federal funding into our state and free up dollars in our state budget to cover other priority areas that have been hard hit by COVID-19.”

UNCOMPENSATED CARE

“Currently, our state pays for health care in inefficient ways. When a Missourian without health insurance goes to the emergency room, that hospital bill usually gets paid by state and local taxes – which means higher insurance premiums. If we expand Medicaid in Missouri, more people would have access to affordable care across our state, keeping health care costs down for everyone.”



MESSAGES

One message that tested well but may not be a good option points out that 37 other states have already expanded Medicaid and asserts Missouri is being left behind.

In discussing this message, some participants said they feel Missouri is unique and not like other states. “We have different kinds of populations... cities and rural areas,” explained a St. Louis resident.



MO LEFT BEHIND

“Thirty-seven states, like Arkansas, Iowa, and Kentucky, have already expanded Medicaid—providing health insurance to low-income adults who don’t get health coverage through their job or make enough to buy it on their own. These states have more people getting access to needed treatment and care, and are growing jobs as a result. Missouri is losing out. Especially in the midst of a public health emergency, it shouldn’t matter where you live – having access to quality, affordable health care is essential. It’s time for our state to protect its people too.”



HEAD-TO-HEAD

We tested a statement from Gov. Parson where he asserts that there is not enough money to expand Medicaid. We asked for opinions about the Governor and this quote. We learned that these Missouri residents have mixed feelings about the Governor – some feel he is not authoritative enough and is “wishy-washy” while some feel he is doing a pretty good job.

Regardless, a large number still want to hear the Governor’s point of view on Medicaid expansion and figure that he has more knowledge about the costs of it than most others. In other words, most will weigh his opinion in their decision to support or oppose Medicaid expansion regardless of their feelings about him.



I don't think it's the time to be expanding anything in the state of Missouri right now. There's absolutely not going to be any extra money whatsoever.

Governor Mike Parson



“The Governor is out of touch.”
Woman from Cape Girardeau/SO MO

“The Governor needs to put a zip in his step... he doesn't want to make the tough decisions.”
Woman from Rural MO

“I hope the Governor looked at the money – how it is going to be paid for – before he made that comment.”
Man from Rural MO

“He's not authoritative enough. He just tip toes around things.”
Woman from Springfield

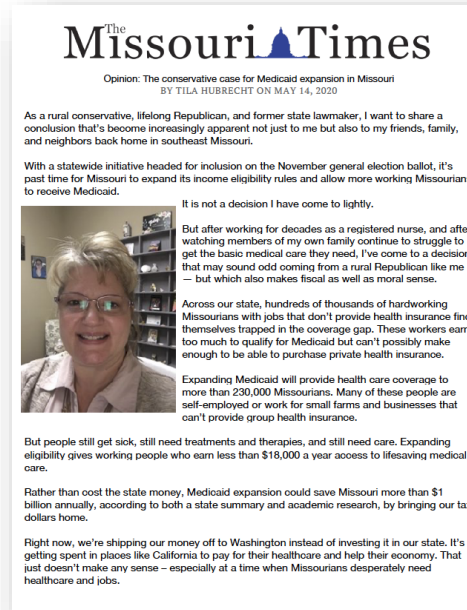


HEAD-TO-HEAD

We introduced an op-ed written by Tila Hubrecht, a former state lawmaker who supports Medicaid expansion, in the last two focus groups. We then asked participants to compare it to the Governor's opinion and choose the one they found more compelling. Most feel Tila Hubrecht made the better arguments.

Many said she made good points about how Medicaid expansion can help rural areas and also bring more money into the state. Most found her a credible voice and appreciated that she is a rural Republican. Many believe the facts she used effectively counter the claims by the Governor that Medicaid expansion is not affordable.

Some conflicted participants particularly found Tila Hubrecht's arguments strong. Still, one or two feel she did not fully address where the funding for expansion will come from.



“She explains what is going on with rural hospitals.”
Woman from Rural MO

“It would resonate with rural Republicans.”
Woman from Rural MO

“I wish she had mentioned where the money was coming from.”
Man from Rural MO

“I liked it that she is addressing an issue my neighbors don't understand. They only think of the big cities when they think about who uses Medicaid... St Louis and Kansas City. But rural people use it too.”
Woman from Rural MO



HEAD-TO-HEAD

In some of the focus groups, we also tested other responses to the Governor’s quote. The strongest response, by far, was the one below from the Chamber of Commerce member. Participants chose this as the best response because it directly addressed the Governor’s claim that the state could not afford to expand Medicaid. “It contradicts the Governor... says it will bring in money. It fights back punch with punch,” explained a Springfield man.

Chamber of Commerce



“Medicaid expansion will bring in more than a billion dollars of federal tax aid in Missouri to help create thousands of jobs and ensure, more importantly, a result in healthier families and a more productive workforce. It’s rare when you have the opportunity to make a business investment, that also is the right thing to do and can have a huge impact on the quality of life in your state and your city,” said Bill Gautreaux, chair of the Civic Council (and Chamber of Commerce member), which represents private employers like H&R Block, Burns & McDonnell and Saint Luke’s Health System.

Nurse

“As nurses, we are on the front lines of healthcare delivery in the state of Missouri,” said Terry Reese, a family nurse practitioner in Branson and board president of the association, which has 2,803 members. “[Nurses] can see firsthand how increased access to health insurance will improve the health, well-being and quality of life for hundreds of thousands of hardworking Missourians.”

Missourian in Coverage Gap

“I was working two jobs and had a cyst on my ovary that required surgery. I had no choice but to have a surgery done that cost more than I made in one year. Neither of my jobs came with healthcare. This is why we need Medicaid expansion,” said Sarah Cooper.

AD CONCEPTS

We tested five ad concepts that could be used in a social media campaign or elsewhere to explain why Medicaid expansion is a good option for Missouri.

The most promising option – “Medicaid Expansion Makes Sense” – emerged from the first three focus groups and was tested in the final two groups (where it was the overwhelming favorite). Focus group participants appreciated the facts and details in the concept, the straightforward tone, and felt it addressed their concerns about how to pay for expansion.



MEDICAID EXPANSION MAKES SENSE

Right now in Missouri, a parent in a family of four must earn \$5,800 or less annually to qualify for Medicaid health insurance. That means there are 300,000 residents across our state who make too much to qualify — but not enough to afford health coverage on their own. By expanding Medicaid, someone who makes up to \$17,800 annually would be covered. Expansion would also bring our taxpayer dollars back to Missouri, save \$39 million in our state budget, create more than 15,000 jobs, and keep rural hospitals open. No matter how you look at it, Medicaid expansion for Missouri just makes sense.



MESSENGERS

When asked who they want to hear speak about Medicaid expansion, participants tend to choose those individuals who have expertise on Medicaid or the authority to make decisions about expansion.

They value knowledge and expertise on this issue.

When it comes to the Governor, many feel he has the ultimate authority to expand or not and so want to know his views. Some also feel he would know best about potential costs to the state.

- Todd Richardson, director of MO HealthNet, which runs Missouri’s Medicaid program
- Randall Williams, MD, Director of Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
- Governor Mike Parson
- Rep. Cody Smith, R-Carthage and chairman of the House Budget Committee
- Herb Kuhn, President and CEO of the Missouri Hospital Association
- Bob Hughes, President and CEO of Missouri Foundation for Health in St. Louis
- Qiana Thomason, CEO of the Health Forward Foundation in Kansas City, MO
- Elijah Haahr, Speaker of the Missouri House of Representatives
- Randy Tobler, Chief executive of Scotland County Hospital in northeast Missouri
- Patrick Geschwind, the interim chief executive for the Pemiscot hospital system, located in one of the poorest counties in Missouri
- Heidi N. Lucas, Director, Missouri Nurses Association
- Kelly Hall of The Fairness Project, a group that sponsors campaigns and ballot initiatives to improve the lives and health of working people in Missouri
- Nimrod Chapel, Jr., President of the Missouri NAACP

Times Selected
20
19
11
6
6
3
3
2
2
2
1
1
1



MESSENGERS

Many also want to hear from health care professionals about Medicaid expansion – namely doctors, nurses, and hospital administrators.

The effectiveness of the op-ed from the former lawmaker and the strong quote from the Chamber of Commerce member suggests there are other effective messengers to use on this issue.

	# Times Selected
A doctor	15
A nurse	14
A hospital administrator	14
A Missouri resident who would benefit from Medicaid expansion	13
A business leader*	2

*This was only asked in the final two groups.

WHERE THEY END UP

The Missourians in the focus groups mostly end up in favor of Medicaid expansion. This is a good result – the majority said they were conflicted about Medicaid before the groups.

The uninsured participants see expansion as a way to get affordable health coverage. Many also feel the current Medicaid eligibility limits are unreasonably low. The COVID-19 crisis adds urgency for others – they feel expansion is needed to help the thousands of Missourians losing jobs. And some are swayed by the economic messages we tested that showed Medicaid expansion could help the state budget and create jobs.

Those who lean against expansion by the end of the groups still worry about how the state is going to pay for expansion. They do not necessarily believe the financial benefits of expansion and worry about adding to the federal deficit during these hard economic times.

“Close the coverage gap... that’s where I am... I want to see it closed.”
Woman from Springfield

“If it’s going to bring in tax money and jobs – and more people have insurance – why wouldn’t you do it?”
Man from Kansas City

“I’m still worried about how we are going to pay for it... and adding to the deficit.”
Man from Springfield



+ gmmb
cause the effect