

Who says Idaho wants Obamacare repealed?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Idaho's all-Republican congressional delegation seems to be in an awful hurry to repeal - and presumably replace - Obamacare.

Which is a bit odd when you consider the picture taking shape in the communities they represent.

For starters, consider the uninsured rate. Before Congress passed the Affordable Care Act, nearly one of every five Idahoans had no health insurance. Only 11 states had a higher rate.

By 2015, that was down to 11 percent. It may have fallen even lower since - and that's without extending Medicaid coverage to some 78,000 low-income Idaho adults, something the state's Republican political establishment refuses to do.

The credit goes to subsidies extended to Idaho families who earn between 100 and 400 percent of the federal poverty rate. That works out to between \$24,300 and \$97,200 for a family of four.

As the Tribune's William L. Spence reported last week, an estimated 87,000 Idahoans are expected to qualify for those subsidies - or about \$241 million - on policies purchased through the state-based insurance exchange, YourHealth Idaho.

Of those, about 13 percent are children - whose parents make too much money to qualify for the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

What happens if these people lose their insurance?

As Idaho Falls physician Ken Krell has noted, the lack of Medicaid coverage could be the difference between life and death for about 368 Idahoans a year.

Without more research, you can't be certain how many of the 87,000 YourHealth Idaho clients would be at risk without insurance. For one thing, they have more resources than the Medicaid gap population. But lacking insurance often translates into forgoing preventive care and delaying treatment.

One thing is for certain. When some of these newly uninsured people require medical treatment, they will turn to the Idaho taxpayer.

No state has a more open-ended commitment to covering bills incurred by the medically indigent than the state of Idaho. Counties are the source of last resort for claims up to \$11,000; after that, the state Catastrophic Health Care program pays the rest.

Before Obamacare took effect in fiscal year 2012, rising caseloads and medical inflation pushed CAT costs to \$27 million while the counties shelled out another \$28 million.

Since then, the state's costs are down to \$16.3 million. The counties spent \$17.6 million. And the program returned nearly \$29 million in money it no longer needed to the state treasury last year.

Cancel Obamacare and you will see those costs skyrocket once again.

Nor can Idaho's congressional delegation maintain they are following the will of the voters. If anything, Idahoans are in no hurry to eliminate Obamacare. Here's what Boise State University's public policy survey uncovered this month:

- 87.4 percent want to keep the Obamacare provisions guaranteeing health insurance coverage for people with pre-existing conditions.

- 75.9 percent say they want to retain a law that allows parents to carry their children on health insurance policies until they turn 26.
- 51.2 percent want to continue the YourHealth Idaho insurance exchange.
- 70.8 percent want the state to provide quality health care to the 78,000 people caught in the Medicaid gap.

So before you vote, Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch and Congressmen Raul Labrador and Mike Simpson, phone home.

You could be in for a surprise.- M.T.