

Left Behind

Lawmakers Leaving Veterans in the Coverage Gap

By Massey Whorley and Michael J. Cassidy

Military veterans and their families in Virginia are among the people who would benefit from expanding Medicaid eligibility under the Affordable Care Act, a move currently being considered by state lawmakers. More than 25,000 veterans, along with their spouses, could gain access to quality, affordable health care coverage – at little cost to the state – if lawmakers do the right thing and approve the expansion.

Contrary to what many people assume, veterans and their families often do not have automatic and easy access to Veterans Affairs (VA) health care despite their service to our country. As a result, over 1.3 million veterans lack health insurance nationally, while hundreds of thousands more only have access to VA health care and, in many cases, may live too far from a VA center to be able to conveniently and routinely get care.

In Virginia, about 32,100 veterans have no insurance and about 17,000 more report having only VA health care.

About 38 percent of all uninsured veterans in Virginia – about 12,300 people – and more than half of VA-only insured veterans – 8,800 – could qualify for coverage under Medicaid expansion, because they had incomes below 138 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) – about \$26,000 for a family of three – in 2010.

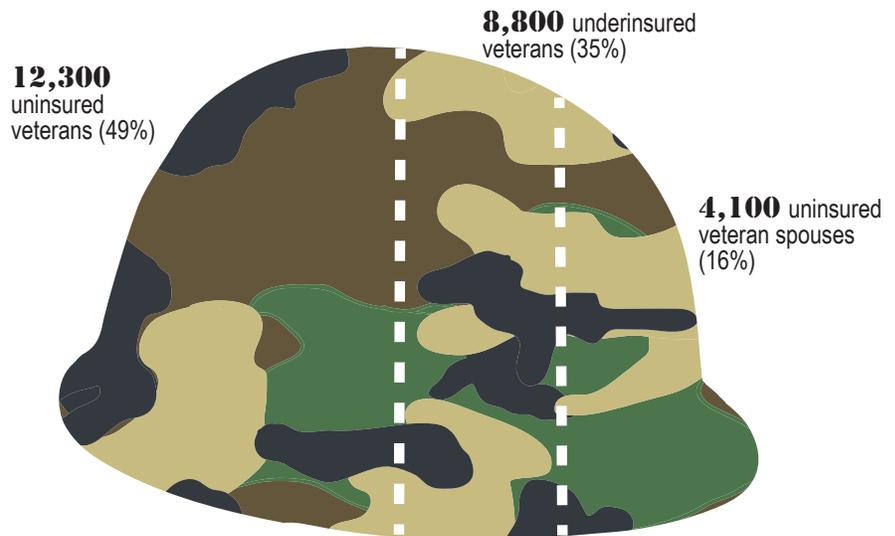
In addition, about 28 percent of veterans' family members are uninsured and report income below 138 percent of FPL. This means that up to another 4,100 veterans' family members in Virginia would be eligible for Medicaid, too.



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25,200 Military veterans and their spouses could get quality, affordable health care coverage through Medicaid expansion.



Source: TCI analysis of Urban Institute data

Uninsured Vets Go Without

Veterans who don't have coverage often struggle to get the care they need. More than 41 percent report that they have unmet health needs, and more than a third delay care due to the cost.

The problem is even worse for their family members. More than half of veterans'

family members who don't have coverage have unmet health needs and 44 percent delay care due to the cost.

By contrast, just over 12 percent of veterans with coverage have unmet health needs and even fewer delay care due to the cost.

VA Benefits Not Automatic

Veterans with incomes below certain thresholds, who served for at least 24 months, and were honorably discharged, are usually eligible for VA health benefits, but coverage is not automatic. In addition to meeting these basic requirements, veterans must also complete an application process, which can be a barrier for

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transient or homeless veterans with no fixed address. Many may not be aware that benefits are available to them in the first place. Expanding Medicaid would ensure these veterans, who served our country, get the medical care they need.

Moreover, veteran's spouses and dependents are only able to access VA health care under certain circumstances, some of which require the veteran to have died in the line of duty or be permanently and totally disabled.

VA Health Care Available at Limited Number of Locations

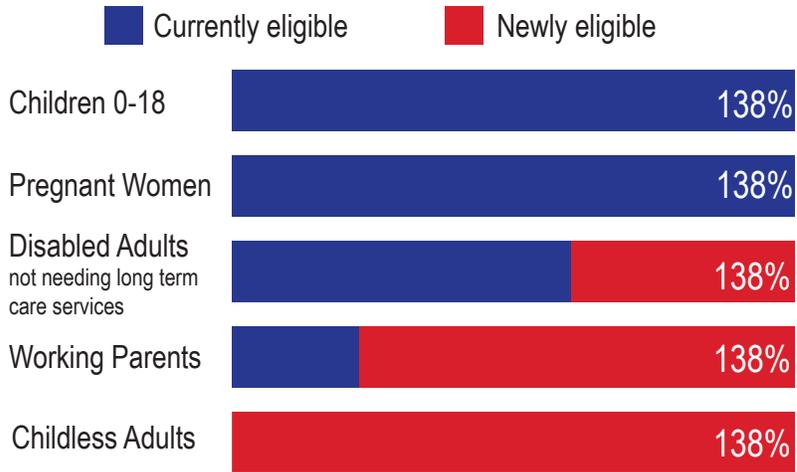
Even veterans who qualify for VA health care face challenges getting the care they need because of the limited number of locations where they can get treatment, routine or otherwise. Virginia has just three VA hospitals: Hampton VA Medical Center in southeastern Virginia; Hunter Holmes McGuire Medical Center in Richmond in the central part of the state; and Salem VA Medical Center in the southwestern part of the state.

While outpatient clinics have opened where veterans can access some VA health care services in Bristol, Charlottesville, Danville, Emporia, Fort Belvoir, Fredericksburg, Harrisonburg, Lynchburg, Norton, Staunton, Tazewell, Virginia Beach, Winchester, and Wytheville, they are no substitute for the access veterans would have to quality care by private physicians in their own communities if Medicaid is expanded in Virginia.

Lawmakers have the opportunity to improve access to health care for hundreds of thousands of Virginians, including tens of thousands of military veterans and their families. By expanding Medicaid, Virginia would take another step to becoming a truly veteran friendly state, and support the troops who have already sacrificed so much for us all.

How Does Expansion Change Eligibility?

New coverage groups will be added and the income eligibility will increase up to 138% of the federal poverty level for most adults.



Source: TCI analysis of DMAS data

Currently, veterans and their family members cannot qualify for Medicaid unless they are very low income and meet additional conditions. There are 25,200 uninsured or underinsured Virginia veterans and their family members at or below 138 percent of FPL (annual income of \$26,344 for a family of three in 2012).

Virginia lawmakers have the opportunity to provide these veterans and their family members access to quality health care coverage at little cost to the state. Under the Affordable Care Act, the state can increase Medicaid eligibility for all groups to 133 percent FPL, with a five percent income disregard. The state would not bear any of the costs of the expansion for the first three years and would be responsible for no more than 10 percent of the costs after that.

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