

EDITORIAL

Expand medical coverage

Texas is one of 23 states nationwide that chose not to expand its Medicaid eligibility requirements in conjunction with the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The resulting coverage gap has left one million impoverished Texans without affordable health care, a situation that is a national embarrassment and a painful reality for many.

The coverage gap occurs because the ACA envisioned expanded Medicaid coverage picking up those who do not earn enough money to receive subsidies and too much to be covered under Medicaid. The threshold for marketplace subsidies to kick in under the ACA is 100 percent of the federal poverty level for an individual (\$11,670 per year). On the other hand, Medicaid will not cover you if you are in a family of three that earns more than 50 percent of the poverty level, or \$9,900.

As you can see from these numbers, the people falling through the cracks are among the poorest of our citizens. How can we in good conscience not consider ways to provide them with the same safety net as others?

The Texas Legislature has balked at adopting Medicaid expansion, citing inefficiencies that would cost the state too much money. However, the federal government would pay 90 percent of the cost of the expanded services for up to 10 years, as is being done for the 27 states that agreed to the Medicaid upgrade.

Texas received a five-year waiver in 2011 that has allowed our state to take in about \$6 billion a year in federal dollars to reimburse hospitals for the care of uninsured patients.

That waiver from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services will be up for renewal in 2016, and some observers are concerned that unless Texas lawmakers agree to expand Medicaid, CMS may turn a cold shoulder.

Clearly there is no reason for us to play chicken with the federal government when the only victims of a losing game are the uninsured poor. It is time for our lawmakers to walk a mile in the shoes of those folks and then do the right thing.