



2-20-13

Policy analyst: M.J. Ellington

(334) 832-9060

## Health Security for Alabama's Uninsured Veterans

**Thousands of Alabama veterans who lack health insurance could gain coverage if Gov. Robert Bentley approves expansion of the state's Medicaid program.** Respect for veterans is a point of pride in Alabama, yet an estimated 27,000 veterans residing in the state, along with 20,000 of their family members, lack the basic security of health coverage.

**Almost half of all uninsured U.S. veterans ages 18 to 65 would qualify for Medicaid under the higher income eligibility limit offered to states by the Affordable Care Act (ACA),** according to a 2012 study by the Urban Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Under the ACA, states now have the option to expand Medicaid to cover people with incomes up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level (about \$15,000 a year for individuals and \$31,000 for a family of four).

**If Alabama chooses to expand Medicaid, the federal government will pay 100 percent of the cost for covering the newly eligible,** with federal contributions gradually dropping to a permanent 90 percent by 2020. The federal share for Alabama's current Medicaid program is 67.4 percent. The expansion would also pump more than \$11.7 billion federal dollars into the state's economy during the first seven years, researchers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham's School of Public Health found.

**While veterans are on active military duty, they and their families receive military health insurance benefits.** Most also receive bridge health insurance coverage in the 180 days before and after active duty service. Beyond those points, many veterans go without health coverage, often despite working one or more jobs.

**Returning to civilian life can be challenging enough without the added burden of being uninsured.** The Urban Institute study found that:

- **Uninsured veterans often suffer from significant health problems,** with one-third having one or more chronic health conditions. Nearly 16 percent have physical, mental or emotional problems that hamper their ability to work, which only compounds the insurance gap. (The unemployment rate for Alabama's post-9/11 veterans was 11 percent in 2011, according to the Congressional Joint Economic Committee.)
- **Uninsured veterans must struggle to get needed health care.** More than 40 percent have unmet medical needs, and 34 percent put off getting care because of cost. Figures on unmet need and care delayed by cost are similar for uninsured veterans' families.

**BOTTOM LINE: Alabama can show its respect for veterans by expanding Medicaid and giving them the health security they deserve.**

For more information, see the Urban Institute report "Uninsured Veterans and Family Members" (May 2012) at [www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org), keyword: veterans; and visit [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov).