

## Ohio Department of Medicaid Report Shows Positive Impact of Medicaid Expansion

Under House Bill 64 of the 131st General Assembly, the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) was required to provide a report that evaluated the impact of Ohio's 2014 Medicaid expansion. Released in December, the report—the Ohio Medicaid Group VIII Assessment—examined how the expansion has affected new enrollees in regard to access and utilization of healthcare, physical and mental health status, financial distress/hardship, and employment. The report is one of the nation's most comprehensive assessments of a state's Medicaid expansion.

The phrase "Group VIII" refers to the section of the Social Security Act that sets requirements for Medicaid expansion eligibility and allowed most Ohioans age 19 through 64 with incomes at or below 138% of the federal poverty level (FPL) to become eligible for Medicaid, according to the ODM. Prior to Jan. 1, 2014, Medicaid eligibility for adults was limited to those with certain qualifying characteristics, such as parenthood or disability, and the income limitation for most Medicaid eligibility groups was lower than 90% of the FPL.

The assessment examined the effects of the Medicaid expansion on recipients enrolled through the Group VIII criteria. When appropriate, these enrollees were compared to those enrolled in Ohio Medicaid under pre-expansion eligibility rules (identified as "pre-expansion enrollees"). The study excluded those enrolled as dual-eligible, pregnant, living in institutions, or with less than 11 months of continual enrollment.

Numerous methods were used to collect data for the report, such as a detailed telephone survey of 7,508 Group VIII and pre-expansion enrollees, a biometric screening of 886 respondents who completed the telephone survey (including both groups of enrollees), and interviews with 10 Ohio Medicaid service providers and other key stakeholders.

### Key findings

Section II of the report focuses on the Group VIII population. It includes a review of the percentage of Ohioans age 19-64 with family income at or below 138% FPL without insurance from 1998-2015.

As of May 2016, the close of the sample selection, a total of 702,000 individuals were eligible for and received Group VIII Medicaid coverage. Findings from the 2015 Ohio Medicaid Assessment Survey indicate that Medicaid expansion contributed to a large decline in the uninsured rate for low-income non-senior adults in Ohio ( $\leq$  138% of the FPL) to the lowest rate ever recorded (14.1%).

Most Group VIII enrollees were uninsured prior to obtaining Medicaid coverage, either because they had no prior insurance at all (75.1%) or they had lost employer-based insurance (13.9%).

Most Group VIII enrollees were white (71.5%), male (55.8%), with a high school degree or less (58.1%), unmarried (83.8%), and without a child in the home (82.1%). Employment rates were similar for Group VIII and pre-expansion enrollees (43.2% versus 41.5%, respectively).

As a result of being older (51.4% were age 45 and older) and more often male than pre-expansion enrollees, Group VIII enrollees had slightly higher rates of health risk indicators, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol, and higher rates of chronic disease diagnoses than the younger and more often female pre-expansion enrollees.

Section III of the report covers health system access and utilization. Group VIII enrollees overwhelmingly reported that access to medical care had become easier since enrolling in Medicaid, the largest gains seen among those who were previously uninsured. Findings also indicated that emergency department use, which is often a very costly form of care, decreased for Group VIII enrollees. Survey results and medical records analyses showed that Group VIII participants were better integrated into the healthcare system.

Section IV of the report covers physical health. Nearly half of Group VIII enrollees (47.7%) reported improvement in their overall health status since enrolling in Medicaid, compared to 3.5% who said their health had worsened. According to the medical records case study, the individuals studied had lower levels of high blood pressure or high cholesterol since enrolling in Medicaid.

Section V of the report covers mental health. Based on a mental health screening of survey participants, about one-third of Group VIII enrollees (31.9%) and 35.7% of pre-expansion

enrollees screened positive for depression or anxiety disorders, with these conditions limiting usual routine activities, including employment. Since enrollment in Medicaid, 44% of Group VIII enrollees reported better access to mental health services.

Also, Medicaid enrollment enabled participants to meet other basic needs. More than half of Group VIII enrollees (58.6%) reported that it was now easier to buy food, 48.1% stated that it was easier to pay their rent or mortgage, and 43.6% said it was easier to pay off other debts. The percentage of Group VIII enrollees with medical debt fell by nearly half since enrolling in Medicaid—55.8% had debt prior to enrollment, whereas 30.8% had debt at the time of the study.

### Summary

Because of Medicaid expansion, almost 1 million low-income Ohioans are receiving healthcare coverage. Also of importance, many Group VIII enrollees were diagnosed with a previously unknown chronic health condition for which they are now able to seek care. Because they were able to obtain treatment for previously untreated conditions, several enrollees stated that they did not think they would be alive today if Medicaid expansion had not occurred. The medical records review findings also indicated that there was an increase in the likelihood that a Group VIII enrollee would visit his or her medical provider at least twice annually.

In addition to the reduction of unmet medical needs, Group VIII enrollees also reported substantial declines in overall stress and financial hardship. Most enrollees reported that Medicaid made it easier to seek employment or remain employed.

Generally, providers and stakeholders had a positive outlook on Medicaid expansion and reported that it had made access to and use of needed care considerably easier for their patients.

Overall, new enrollees reported being grateful for their Medicaid expansion healthcare coverage and valued having access to Ohio's healthcare system, according to the assessment. To view the full report go to [www.medicaid.ohio.gov](http://www.medicaid.ohio.gov). ■