

## Message from the President and CEO: Time for States to Address Health Coverage Gap

April 28, 2015

Dear Partners:

The Kansas Legislature is nearing the wrap-up of the 2015 legislative session, so time is running out on advancing a solution this year for the state's health care coverage gap. This week, I am sending a note to legislators in the REACH Foundation's service area asking them to invest in the health of our state by supporting the expansion of KanCare, the state's Medicaid program.

I understand this topic is a difficult one for many legislators, but there is a strong health and business case to be made for expanding Medicaid. Access to health care enables Kansans to work, manage their health and take care of their families. Healthy workers are more productive, and better able to pursue and keep jobs. In addition, health coverage provides a measure of protection from financial stress and ruin when an unexpected health problem occurs.

More and more states that opposed Medicaid expansion have taken a second look at this option. The federal match rates are strong -- 90 cents federal match for the state's 10-cent contribution. While some state leaders maintain that the federal match money is not reliable, Kansas routinely accepts federal matching dollars for education, transportation, energy and more. Furthermore, HHS has shown a willingness to consider state-specific proposals for closing the coverage gap. At least six states have obtained approval for their own unique approaches. *It is time for Kansas to do the same.*



The Kansas Hospital Association, with support from hospital and safety net clinic leaders, medical providers and community-based health programs, has been talking with legislators about an alternative proposal (HB 2319) that calls for expanding KanCare. At the REACH Foundation, we are encouraging lawmakers in our area to consider this option. In Missouri, a few determined lawmakers have proposed various pathways for expanding eligibility to reduce the coverage gap. We are encouraged by these conversations.

Philanthropy, charity care and the increasingly strained safety net cannot fill the gap that leaves thousands of Kansas and Missouri residents without options for health insurance. While some lawmakers believe that charity is the answer, this situation demands a systems solution.

Many of you have been actively (or more accurately, aggressively) working to secure that solution, reaching out to consumers, community members and elected leaders in our state capitals and in their home districts. The Kansas and Missouri Hospital Associations, safety net health care providers, consumer advocates, local governments and several of our area chambers of commerce have been speaking up on this issue, too. We are grateful for your efforts and the support of other civic, business and faith organizations. Let's keep spreading this message both in Kansas and Missouri.

We'll be sending another message out to our elected representatives this week. We encourage you to do the same.

With Appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda R. Sharpe".

Brenda R. Sharpe  
President & CEO

I welcome your thoughts on REACH's work in this area. Email: [brenda@reachhealth.org](mailto:brenda@reachhealth.org)  
[Read testimony](#) submitted to the Kansas House Health and Human Services Committee