Medicaid expansion now covers over two-thirds of potential enrollees

BY TUCKER DOHERTY, POLITICO PRO DATAPONT

The Affordable Care Act’s expansion of Medicaid is once again growing as more states adopt it. Following successful ballot initiatives in 2018, Idaho and Utah fully implemented the expansion in January 2020. Voters also approved expansion in Nebraska, but implementation will likely be delayed until October 2020. Collectively, these three states will eventually add approximately 360,000 beneficiaries to their Medicaid rolls, according to estimates from Urban Institute.

On Jan. 9, Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly (D) and state Senate Majority Leader7 Kim Denning (R) announced a bipartisan plan to adopt expansion in their state, potentially adding another 129,000 estimated new enrollees to the program. Expansion in the remaining 14 states remains uncertain. Proponents in Missouri, Oklahoma and South Dakota are organizing for a 2020 ballot initiative, and Georgia’s governor has proposed a partial expansion. But in most states, GOP opposition will likely prevent further Medicaid expansion in the near future.

Since 2014, state adoption of Medicaid expansion has slowly grown

More than half of the remaining potential enrollees reside in Texas, Florida and Georgia

In total, according to Urban Institute estimates, more than 6.5 million adults would gain Medicaid coverage if the remaining 14 holdout states adopted the expansion.

Of the largest states remaining, only Georgia is considering an expansion in the near future, albeit a partial expansion with a work requirement that would require additional federal approvals to move forward. Ballot initiatives could spur adoption in several smaller states, but implementation in those states could be difficult.

"The lesson of the most recent expansions is that political support is essential," explained Urban Institute senior fellow Matthew Buettgens.

Despite the success of a 2017 ballot initiative, implementation was delayed for a year in Maine due to the sitting GOP governor’s opposition. After a series of legal battles, implementation only proceeded after a new Democratic governor was elected in 2018. In contrast, Virginia’s adoption of Medicaid expansion, which has proceeded more smoothly, enjoyed a degree of bipartisan support during its legislative passage in 2018.