

## OUTLOOK

# Janda: Medicaid not broken, but a blessing to children in poverty

Texas leaders are wrong to describe federal health care program as a burden or claim that it's broken

By Ken Janda | March 26, 2015 | Updated: March 26, 2015 6:40pm

Some of our Texas leaders have developed a "B-word" problem. They talk about broken and a burden, when the truest word is blessing. What's a blessing? Approximately 3 million Texas children living in poverty have access to health care. What gives these children access to health care? Medicaid. The overwhelming majority of Texans enrolled in Medicaid are children. There are some pregnant mothers and disabled adults on Medicaid, but they are a small slice of the pie. Medicaid in Texas equals poor children.

When Texas leaders talk about Medicaid growing to be a larger part of our state's budget, they miss the truth of its growth: More families are stuck in poverty, and more children are living in poverty. In fact, 1 in 4 children in our state live in poverty. As the Austin-American Statesman said recently: Texas has a poverty problem, not a Medicaid problem.

As the CEO of a managed care organization in Texas, I can report accurately that Medicaid is a blessing to Texans and Texas, not a burden and not broken. There is room for improvement, certainly, but Texas has led groundbreaking statewide Medicaid innovation through an agreement with the federal government. And through private managed care organizations that coordinate care for Medicaid enrollees, more patients keep appointments and address health problems before they become expensive medical crises.

Medicaid helps those millions of children living in poverty, helps them stay in school, learn and grow up to contribute to our lives, communities and businesses. Without Medicaid, more children, infants and pregnant mothers would die. Without Medicaid, more sick children would be in our schools and churches. Without Medicaid, more parents would have to stay home from work, endangering their livelihoods, in an attempt to care for their children. Without Medicaid, our safety-net hospitals, already in crisis due to shortsighted policies and temporary fixes, would be in even greater peril.

What is broken in Texas? What is a burden? Some of our policies and some of our ways of thinking about health care delivery and economic development. As Chronicle columnist Chris Tomlinson describes the situation ("Politicians in state Capitol make Texans pay twice for uninsured" Page D1, March 8), our policies make Texans pay twice for health care, looking at financial matters alone. If you look at the larger policies that woo businesses to Texas but don't care for or educate its people, we pay more than twice. I thank God we have programs such as Medicaid to care for our children. It is a blessing, and we must step up to be better stewards of this blessing. What else is a blessing? The opportunity to expand Texas-style Medicaid with smart, well-managed reforms and return billions of dollars to Texas, spurring additional economic growth.

There are plenty of ways Medicaid could be better. Yes, specific actions should be taken to improve Medicaid, reduce administrative burdens for providers, and make it more effective. But Medicaid is neither broken nor a burden - not when it is saving so many children. Anyone who calls Medicaid a burden doesn't understand the reality of our health care system, or perhaps doesn't understand the poverty in which so many Texan children are trapped.

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*This article can be found in its entirety, including photos and comments, online at: <http://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/outlook/article/Janda-Medicaid-not-broken-but-a-blessing-to-6161579.php?t=47a2375ad8&cmpid=email-premium#comments>*