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COVER GEORGIA COALITION LAUNCHES EFFORT TO ENSURE THAT THE STATE MOVES FORWARD WITH THE MEDICAID EXPANSION

ATLANTA, Ga., January 10, 2013 – More than 40 organizations – including healthcare providers, hospitals and healthcare advocates – announced today the creation of a coalition in support of expanding Medicaid to Georgians with incomes below 133 percent of the federal poverty level as authorized by the federal health care reform law, the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

Called *Cover Georgia*, the coalition is spearheaded by Georgians for a Healthy Future and is comprised of a wide range of healthcare stakeholders, including the Georgia Rural Health Association, the Georgia Academy of Family Physicians, AARP Georgia, the American Cancer Society, among many others.

Enacted by Congress in 2010, the Affordable Care Act included the Medicaid Expansion provision, which would provide the states with billions of dollars in new federal funds to enroll currently uninsured citizens in their Medicaid programs. In Georgia, expanding the program is projected to cover approximately 650,000 Georgians and to bring approximately \$33 billion in federal funds into the state over ten years. For the first three years of the expansion, the federal government will fund 100 percent of the new cost; after that, the states would be required to cover no more than 10 percent of the total cost from 2020 onward.

Cover Georgia will make the case that expanding Georgia's Medicaid program and leveraging the billions of dollars in federal resources will improve access to care, strengthen the state's health care delivery system, and bolster Georgia's economy. "This is an unprecedented opportunity to impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of Georgians and we simply cannot pass up this opportunity," said Amanda Ptashkin, outreach and advocacy director for Georgians for a Healthy Future, the organization spearheading the coalition work.

When the U.S. Supreme Court decided the constitutionality of the ACA in 2012, it ruled that states could not be compelled to participate in the Medicaid Expansion. So far, Governor Deal has said he does not plan to move forward with the expansion in Georgia, expressing concerns about the state budget and the long-term fiscal outlook at the federal level.

“Cover Georgia is a statewide education and advocacy campaign focused on spotlighting both the critical role that Medicaid plays within Georgia today and the opportunity that implementing an expansion of the program presents for consumers, the health care system, and our state’s economy,” said Cindy Zeldin, executive director of Georgians for a Healthy Future. “Covering the lowest-income uninsured through Medicaid will provide access to the basic prevention and treatment services that uninsured Georgians lack today and will pump an infusion of federal dollars into our state’s health care economy.”

“Other states across the country are saying yes to the Medicaid expansion and are investing in their state’s health care delivery system with federal taxpayer dollars paid by Georgians. Georgia cannot afford to maintain the status quo while other states invest heavily in their health systems. Doing so will further compound regional health disparities and limit Georgia’s ability to compete in the long-run.”

Matt Caseman, of the Georgia Rural Health Association, agrees that in addition to the overall economy, the expansion will help rural Georgia. “Expanding Medicaid will provide thousands of rural Georgians, who don’t have health insurance, access to a primary care doctor and preventative medicine. It will help reduce the burden of uncompensated care and keep the doors open for our safety net providers. This initiative is critical to not only the health of Georgia’s rural communities, but our state’s overall economic success as well.”

Tim Sweeney, of the Georgia Budget & Policy Institute, believes that access to affordable health coverage is one of the most pressing health care issues facing the state. “Expanding Medicaid to cover hundreds of thousands of low-income Georgians is one of the most cost-effective ways to address the issue. Implementing the expansion will enable more Georgians to access needed health care, while boosting Georgia’s economy by bringing billions in new federal funding for doctors, hospitals, pharmacies and other health care providers throughout the state.”

The consequences of this decision will affect hundreds of thousands of Georgians. AARP Georgia State Director, Greg Tanner, points out that, “there are 127,000 Georgians in their 50s or early 60s who make less than \$15,000 a year and have no health insurance. Expanding Medicaid to cover them would make them more productive and in the first three years pump \$8 billion into Georgia. That money will go directly to doctors, hospitals, clinics and other health care providers. We can’t afford not to expand coverage.”

If the state decides to forgo expanding the Medicaid Expansion, those individuals who earn more than our current eligibility levels but less than 100% FPL (Federal Poverty Level) will have no options for coverage and would not qualify for subsidized coverage in the state’s health insurance exchanges. Those individuals will fall into a coverage gap.

The Cover Georgia coalition will continue to work on educating the public, key decision-makers and others on the importance of the expansion and what it means for our citizens. Individual consumers, health care professionals, policy-makers and others can learn more about Georgia's Medicaid program and what the expansion would mean for thousands of Georgians by visiting Cover Georgia's website at www.coverga.org.