

# Medicaid Matters

## Bentley, Williamson, discuss consequences of underfunding Medicaid

A group of Alabama Medicaid providers joined Governor Robert Bentley and State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson on May 1 to discuss budget challenges facing the Alabama Medicaid Agency and how underfunding the agency would have a dramatic impact on the state's health care system as a whole.

"Medicaid funding affects all people, whether they're enrolled in Medicaid or not," Governor Bentley said. "Hospitals, doctors' offices, and nursing homes depend on Medicaid to provide



funding that sustains the services they offer to all patients. Without proper Medicaid funding, the strain on the health care system would be severe. We must provide Medicaid the state funding it needs in order to ensure that health care providers are in a financial position to serve the public and save lives."

Dr. Williamson was recently chosen by Governor Bentley to conduct a review of Medicaid's operations and finances.

*Dr. Williamson addresses Medicaid providers at a meeting on April 13.*

Dr. Williamson presented his findings, showing that Medicaid will need a minimum of \$600 million from the state's General Fund in fiscal year 2013 to remain a viable agency.

"In my 20 years as State Health Officer, the budget decisions that will be made over the next few weeks will be the most crucial I have ever seen," Dr. Williamson said. "The \$600 million figure is a bare minimum funding level, and even at that funding level, Medicaid will still be a lean program. Any cuts below \$600 million would seriously impact people's health. We would start to see hospitals and nursing homes reducing beds, eliminating services, or even closing, leaving patients with nowhere else to turn for critical care."

Joining Governor Bentley and Dr. Williamson were Michael Warren, CEO, Children's Hospital of Alabama; Barry Cochran, administrator, Fayette Medical Center; Joseph Marchant, administrator, Bibb Medical Center and Nursing Home; Dr. Michael Ramsey, Dothan pediatrician; and Frank Brown, CEO, USA Health Care, Cullman.



*Dr. Ramsey comments during the Governor's press conference.*

Already, Alabama provides among the lowest level of benefits for Medicaid recipients when compared to other states. Any significant cuts to the already lean agency would have devastating consequences. [Read more >>](#)



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- Gov. Bentley names Azar Acting Alabama Medicaid Commissioner
- Alabama Medicaid receives grant to help rebalanced long term care

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## Gov. Bentley names Azar Acting Alabama Medicaid Commissioner

Gov. Robert Bentley has appointed Stephanie McGee Azar as Acting Commissioner of the Alabama Medicaid Agency effective May 1, 2012.



In this role, Azar will coordinate closely with the Governor's Office and with State Health Officer Donald Williamson, MD, who will continue to lead the transition at Medicaid. While serving as Acting Commissioner, she will continue in her current position of General Counsel with the Agency, a role in which she has served since March 2010.

A native of Dutton, Ala., Azar received her bachelor's degree in English and a minor in Political Science from the University of Alabama in 1992, and in 1995 graduated from the University of Alabama School of Law. Prior to joining Alabama Medicaid in 1999, she was employed with the Montgomery law firm of Thorington and Gregory where she specialized in estate planning and corporate law.

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## Alabama Medicaid receives grant to help “rebalance” long-term care

The Alabama Medicaid Agency has received a \$200,000 federal grant to conduct a comprehensive planning effort required to implement a “Money Follows the Person” program in the state. The Agency was notified in April that the state's proposal to create new options for people who want to transition into the community from nursing home or other institutional care had been selected for funding.

The grant will be used to develop an operational plan and meet other requirements in order to apply for additional federal grant funds later in 2012. The “Money Follows the Person” program is designed to help states “rebalance” their long-term care systems by increasing the use of home and community-based services and decreasing the use of institutional care. Instead of institutional care, states will use funds to expand services and supports in the community.

“Alabama has recently made great strides in our ability to offer more services and programs in the community versus institutionalization,” said Ginger Wettingfeld, deputy director of Medicaid's Long Term Care Division and manager for the grant project. “The Money Follows the Person Rebalancing Demonstration Program will provide Alabama with the means to continue in a direction that offers greater choice to our recipients.”

Grant funds will be used to contract with an individual with expertise and knowledge regarding the Money Follows the Person program to coordinate the planning effort. The project will include the development of a planning workgroup and outreach to individuals and groups across the state that have a direct affiliation with and interest in the supports transitioning individuals will require. [Read more >>](#)



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