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Ohio Office of Health Transformation News- June 12, 2012

The Cleveland Plain Dealer

Editorial: A shorter wait for Medicaid in Ohio

Gov. John Kasich's office has begun a much-needed overhaul of the creaky, time-consuming way poor and uninsured children and pregnant women get access to federal medical benefits.

Applying for help now can take a mountain of paperwork, a face-to-face meeting with a county worker and a 45-day wait just to determine Medicaid eligibility.

Meanwhile, the health of needy children and women -- and of the women's unborn children -- suffers.

Speeding up the process is a better, more humane and more cost-efficient approach for the roughly 1.2 million impoverished and uninsured children and pregnant women who state officials estimate are eligible for Medicaid -- a little more than half of all Medicaid recipients in Ohio.

Pilot projects at the MetroHealth System in Cleveland, Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus and the Community Action Committee of Pike County will quickly screen possibly eligible children and pregnant women. If they seem to qualify for Medicaid, they'll be treated under the federal system for 60 days while their applications are pending, says Eric Poklar, a spokesman for the Governor's Office of Health Transformation.

More screening sites could be added in the new few months, says Poklar. The state wants the program to go statewide by January 2013. Poklar says it's one of a number of efficiency innovations being studied by the health transformation office.

To skeptics who worry streamlined screening will open the door to freeloaders, Poklar notes that other states with similar policies have found that most of those screened are eligible and that early screening can avoid thousands of dollars in medical costs for low-weight or premature babies whose mothers didn't receive timely maternal health care.

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