

Create your website or online store in minutes.

GET STARTED

Maddox: Use Medicaid expansion to improve mental health care

Brian Lyman, Montgomery Advertiser Published 3:12 p.m. CT Sept. 24, 2018 | Updated 4:38 p.m. CT Sept. 24, 2018



(Photo: Mickey Welsh)

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Walt Maddox on Monday pledged to use Medicaid expansion to improve mental health care services in the state, and criticized Gov. Kay Ivey for what he called a lack of investment in the state's health care network.

At a press conference outside the former Greil Memorial Hospital, which closed in 2012 as part of an effort to move mental health patients into community care, the Tuscaloosa mayor outlined his own efforts to keep Bryce Hospital open in that city and said the state was turning away from a tradition of prioritizing mental health care.

"How we treat our fellow man is, I believe, one of the ways we will be judged," Maddox said. "Right now, under the Bentley-Ivey administration, those vulnerable to mental illness have been forgotten about. The decisions regarding their lives are budget-driven, in the hopes Alabama will forget about them."

In a statement, the Ivey campaign highlighted the appointment of Lynn Beshear as commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and recent increases in the department's funding.

"I'm proud of the progress made so far, and I look forward to continuing to work together with educators, health care providers, and job creators across the state to improve life for our children, youth and adults who are affected by mental illnesses," Ivey said in a statement.

The Alabama Legislature last spring approved a budget that increased the Alabama Department of Mental Health's budget by \$8.9 million to about \$118 million. Like most other state agencies, its funding levels are lower than they were in 2007, before the Great Recession hit.



Democratic gubernatorial nominee Walt Maddox, along with Montgomery County Probate Judge Steven Reed, holds a press conference front of the Montgomery Area Mental Health Authority office in Montgomery, Ala., as he

The closing of Greil and other hospitals was part of a broader effort to help mentally-ill individuals into the community and help with their care. Maddox acknowledged that move but said that the state failed to supply services to support that move.

Besides Medicaid expansion, Maddox said he would use \$25 million from his proposed education lottery to provide "wrap around" mental health services to help students in Alabama schools and use money from sports gaming and gambling compacts to increase money for the General Fund, which funds the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

Republicans have resisted Medicaid expansion due to philosophical opposition to the Affordable Care Act, and questions about paying the state's share. A 2012 University of Alabama Birmingham study estimated the annual cost would range from \$178 million to \$375 million a year.

The study also said that expansion could generate \$2.2 to \$4.6 billion in new economic activity in the state. Maddox cited [a review of Medicaid expansion studies by the Kaiser Family Foundation](https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/the-effects-of-medicaid-expansion-under-the-aca-updated-findings-from-)

(<https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/the-effects-of-medicaid-expansion-under-the-aca-updated-findings-from->

campaigns across the state on his bus tour on Monday September 24, 2018. (Photo: Mickey Welsh)

[a-literature-review-march-2018/](#)), which found "no significant increases in spending from state funds" in states that expanded Medicaid, and almost \$200 million in savings in Louisiana, in part due to a reduction in the uninsured population.

Echoing a recent campaign by the Alabama Hospital Association ([/story/news/politics/2018/09/21/alabama-hospitals-launch-campaign-medicaid-expansion/1382909002/](#)), Maddox also touted the economic advantages of Medicaid expansion.

"There is not a bigger jobs package that could be offered to the state of Alabama than the expansion of Medicaid," he said.

Alabama probate judges oversee involuntary commitments. Montgomery County Probate Judge Steven Reed, a fellow Democrat who joined Maddox at the press conference, said that a lack of beds could complicate efforts to get individuals the care they need. At a roundtable last month, [hospital executives told Sen. Doug Jones](#) ([/story/news/politics/2018/09/21/alabama-hospitals-launch-campaign-medicaid-expansion/1382909002/](#)) that there were only nine beds statewide for adolescents needing committals. Reed referred to families who "have to lock a loved one out of the house or lock them in car in a driveway" out of fear for what they might do.

"It's no different than any other illness we deal with, whether it's cancer, whether it's heart disease, whether it's diabetes, we have to treat it as such," he said. "All too often, we try to find shortcuts to treatment in Alabama."

Maddox's appearance was part of a statewide bus tour organized by the campaign. The Democratic nominee will need a strong victory in Montgomery to boost his prospects for victory in November.

Updated at 4:38 p.m. with comment from the Ivey campaign.

Read or Share this story: <https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/politics/2018/09/24/use-medicaid-expansion-improve-mental-health-care-says-maddox/1409227002/>

Build your beautiful website.

TRY IT FOR FREE

 SQUARESPACE