

UTAH BUSINESS EDUCATION

New University of Utah Health program to open access to contraceptive services for the uninsured, train health providers

By Ben Lockhart | Nov 3, 2018, 6:25pm EDT

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University of Utah Health has launched a statewide contraceptive training and education program for medical providers in the state who deliver reproductive services to patients who are Medicaid-insured or uninsured. | Adobe Stock

SALT LAKE CITY — University of Utah Health has launched a statewide contraceptive training and education program for medical providers in the state who deliver reproductive services to patients who are Medicaid-insured or uninsured.

The program, called Family Planning Elevated, will be housed in the Family Planning Division of the University of Utah's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

It will provide funds to train Utah medical professionals on expanding their capacity to provide contraceptive services for Medicaid-insured or uninsured women, and extending those organizations' public outreach to women who fall in such categories.

The new initiative was launched Wednesday with the help of a \$4 million grant from the Laura and John

This year, the Utah Legislature passed HB12, effectively enacting a request for a Medicaid waiver that requires the federal health insurance program to pay for contraceptive services provided to Utah women under the federal poverty level.

Legislators who overwhelmingly passed the measure expressed hope it would reduce abortions and save the state money in other areas of health care. Utah had been just one of seven states without such a provision in its Medicaid program.

For any women up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level not insured by Medicaid or another coverage plan, Family Planning Elevated will step in and reimburse the contraceptives services they receive through participating health providers, making it of no cost to the patient.

With regard to Family Planning Elevated's provider training, the main focus will be on assisting those in community health centers, which serve a large number of low-income patients, but others will be able to participate as well.

On-the-ground training is needed for medical providers who have the required licensure and medical school training to administer contraceptives, but for whom such services have not been a part of their practice, causing them to "lose their skills or lose their confidence in these skills," said Kyl Myers, program director for Family Planning Elevated and a research assistant professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the U.

Myers said HB12 is "fantastic" for creating "theoretical access" but that "you really need to have some boots on the ground to have some actual access" by equipping more providers with the capacity to serve those now eligible to receive contraceptive services for free.

For example, she said, "there's a lack of training for physicians who don't know how to (administer) IUDs and implants," she said.

Those devices, and other reversible methods of contraception such as birth control pills, patches, and injections, are the services addressed by Family Planning Elevated.

Myers said Family Planning Elevated estimates 13,000 Utahns will receive contraceptive care through the initiative from 2019 to 2021. Myers hopes the program may ultimately last longer if it is successful enough to convince key players it is a wise investment.

A similar program operated by the same division in the U.'s Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, called HER Salt Lake, was in place for parts of 2016 and 2017 but was limited to Salt Lake County. Myers said 7,402 patients received free contraceptive services as part of that push.

"We saw that there was definitely a need. We served twice as many people as we anticipated we would," she said. "We wanted to do it for longer and we wanted to do it statewide."

Myers said Family Planning Elevated wants all Utah women to have contraception available to them as they make family planning decisions with "huge, life-changing consequences."

"It's truly the difference between maybe having the opportunity to become more financially independent, and self-sufficient, and completing your education, and having your family when you were planning to, rather than having an unintended pregnancy," Myers said.

She also said the program "will reduce geographic and economic barriers" for uninsured Utah women.

"This is just the right thing to do," she said.

Besides being reimbursed for services, participating health organizations will also receive a cash grant as high as \$100,000 from Family Planning Elevated to assist in their efforts to improve their contraceptive services.

Applications to participate in the program are due Nov. 16.

The organization is holding a Contraceptive Education and Training Conference on Jan. 18 at the University Guest House on the U.'s campus for physicians and other providers. Anyone seeking more information can do so at www.fpeutah.org.

Utah lawmakers passed a related piece of legislation earlier this year making it possible for women to not have to schedule an appointment with their doctor each time they want to renew a birth control pill prescription. That change, designed to reduce barriers to the medication, is still being implemented, according to the Utah Department of Health.

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