



## PRESS RELEASE

**CONTACT: Sara Gagné-Holmes**  
**(207) 626-7058, Ext. 201**  
[sgh@mejp.org](mailto:sgh@mejp.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 21, 2013**

### **Growing Coalition Rallies for Health Care Expansion**

*Cover Maine Now!: Maine Can Change Thousands of Lives for the Better*

**SOUTH PORTLAND** – Supporters of accepting federal funds to provide health insurance to 69,500 Mainers rallied today in South Portland.

The Cover Maine Now! Coalition, which includes more than 70 groups, held the rally to demonstrate growing support for a provision of the Affordable Care Act that would provide 100 percent federal funding for Maine to expand access to health insurance for thousands of low-income Mainers.

“The Cover Maine Now! Coalition is growing everyday as more people and organizations lend their voice to this important cause,” said Sara Gagné-Holmes, executive director of Maine Equal Justice Partners and one of the coalition organizers. “Maine has the chance to change the lives of 69,500 people, to improve their health, and to improve their lives. We have come together because we cannot let this opportunity be lost.”

The coalition’s members represent a diverse cross-section of the state and include businesses, nonprofits, faith-based and other civic organizations. Some of the members are: AARP, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Maine Medical Association, Maine Small Business Association, Maine Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland.

“For low-income people, high premiums and out-of-pocket health care expenses can keep them from obtaining coverage or seeing a doctor when they should,” said Father Richard Senghas, who is a priest with the Roman Catholic Diocese in Portland and a doctor. “Maine has a truly once in a lifetime opportunity to address this unmet need for 69,500 Mainers if we accept the federal funding available

under the Affordable Care Act. Affordable and accessible health care for them is a good thing morally, ethically, medically and fiscally.”

The federal government will pay 100 percent of the cost of covering “newly eligible” individuals for three years. After that, the federal contribution will be gradually adjusted until it reaches 90 percent in 2020.

“Having access to health care coverage is especially important for older adults who are not yet eligible for Medicare,” said Meredith Tipton of AARP Maine’s Volunteer Executive Council. “Leaving people uninsured without access to primary and preventive care could jeopardize even the most careful preparation for health and financial security in later life. In fiscal terms, it is foolish for the state to refuse federal support for the citizens of Maine. In human terms, it is simply unthinkable to deny it to them.”

The coalition supports [legislation by Rep. Linda Sanborn](#) of Gorham that would authorize Maine to accept federal dollars to expand access to health care. The bill, “An Act To Increase Access to Health Coverage and Qualify Maine for Federal Funding,” has support from Democrats, Republicans and Independents in the Legislature.

Accepting federal dollars already set aside to cover Maine’s uninsured will benefit the entire state, reduce the rate of uninsured, and boost the economy.

- **More Mainers Will Have Health Insurance:** Forty percent of the uninsured in this state have incomes at or below 133% of the poverty level.
- **Health Care Costs Will Go Down:** With insurance, people will be less likely to delay the care they need; their overall health will improve; and their need for more costly care will be reduced.
- **Coverage Saves Lives and Improves Health:** A recent Harvard study found that expansions of Medicaid coverage were associated with an improvement in overall health status and a significant reduction in death rates.
- **Charity Care Will Decrease and People with Insurance Will See Rate Relief:** This coverage will keep people out of emergency rooms and dramatically reduce rates of charity care for all hospitals in Maine. The decrease in the cost of hospitals’ charity care means there will be less shifting of costs to private payers and could save the average ratepayer \$1,000 a year.
- **Workers Will Be Healthier:** Health coverage helps to prevent and treat illness and helps people with chronic conditions to better manage their health.
- **Maine’s Economy Will Grow:** Millions of new federal dollars will be invested in our health care system, creating thousands of new jobs for our State.
- **Thousands of Uninsured Maine Veterans Will Gain Coverage:** Approximately 7,000 uninsured Maine veterans who do not have health insurance today could be covered in 2014 if Maine accepts these federal funds.

“I work with patients every day who are fighting for their lives. Instead of being able to focus on fighting cancer, they are worried about how they are going to pay their medical bills,” said Heather Ciccarelli, a volunteer with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network and a patient resource navigator for the American Cancer Society at Maine Medical Center. “They are making decisions about their care based on what they can afford, instead of on what is best for their health. Maine has the opportunity right now to make a decision that will allow more cancer patients to focus on fighting cancer.”

A [recent report](#) by Maine Equal Justice Partners and the Maine Center for Economic Policy found that expanding access to health care with federal funding would add more than \$350 million to Maine's economy and create more than 3,100 jobs in the state.

For a full list of coalition members, visit: <http://www.covermainenow.com>.

###