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Bloomington The Herald-Times Editorial

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Indiana may well have created a better way to deliver health care to more Hoosiers than by expanding Medicaid.

In a recent visit to Bloomington to tout the Healthy Indiana Plan 2.0, Secretary of the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration Dr. John Wernert presented a convincing case that the Hoosier way will provide greater access to care, broader coverage and better outcomes.

We've criticized Gov. Mike Pence for refusing to follow the Affordable Care Act model of expanding Medicaid. It seemed the governor was making a political point in opposing President Obama's signature legislation, and doing so at the expense of hundreds of thousands of Hoosiers who don't have insurance coverage for health care.

Wernert acknowledged the state was told, essentially, to put up or shut up.

The president challenged Republican states to develop specific plans that would cut costs, cover more people and increase choice, and that's what we have done. The HIP 2.0 Plan is the best plan for Hoosiers because it's been developed by Hoosiers.

Let's not get carried away. Pence's instinct to fight everything the federal government wants to do because Hoosiers can do it better is not always valid.

But in this case, the HIP 2.0 plan looks a little better than the federal government's ideas.

According to information provided by Wernert, the original Healthy Indiana Plan reduced inappropriate emergency room use by 7 percent and increased the use of generic drugs, both cost cutters. In addition, when surveyed, 96 percent of HIP enrollees said they were satisfied with their coverage and 93 percent made small but required medical savings account contributions on time, showing they were not just happy but willing to participate in the system.

HIP 2.0 will expand that model, growing from the 62,000 enrolled in HIP this year to 400,000 by 2016 and more than 500,000 by 2020. Nothing about health care is simple, but HIP 2.0's promise is easy to understand. The plan would provide greatly expanded insurance coverage, as Medicaid would, but will also add access to more care such as dental and vision, and provide better outcomes in other words, keep people healthier.

You would expect Pence and Wernert, his appointee, to tout the plan, but leaders of other organizations such as the Indiana Hospital Association, the Indiana State Medical Association and Covering Kids and Families of Indiana have publicly stated their support for HIP 2.0 as well.

Local physician Rob Stone, among the states most ardent advocates for expanded health care coverage for low income Hoosier families, had only praise for Pence and HIP 2.0 in a column that appeared in the June 30 edition of the H-T. The plan, he wrote, may accomplish exactly what we have been asking for coverage for 300,000 to 450,000 Hoosiers currently without health insurance.

If the plan gains approval from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and we hope it does, the next step will be to monitor closely to make sure it delivers what is promised. The overarching issue of the Affordable Care Act Obamacare if you prefer is to attack the multi-layered issues involving provision of health care today. Hopefully the numbers will show HIP 2.0 is a better idea provided by Hoosiers.