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South Florida would gain 20,000 health care jobs, more than any other region in the state, if Medicaid is expanded, according to a report released last week by University of Florida researchers.

Commissioned by the Florida Hospital Association to urge the state legislature to accept the federal funds to expand the Medicaid program in the state, the report notes that jobs in health care as well as other industries would be given a big boost if Florida accepts \$51 million in federal funding to cover its more than 1 million uninsured residents.

Demonstrating job creation is one way to sell the Legislature — and even perhaps the public — on accepting the federal funds, admits Bruce Rueben, president of the hospital group.

“It has a tremendously positive impact not just on health care, but on the economy,” he said.

About 13,000 of the jobs would be in Broward and more than 8,400 in Palm Beach County, according to the report by UF's Food & Resource Economics Department. Statewide, the expansion would result in more than 121,000 permanent, high-wage jobs in Florida over the next 10 years, according to the report.

Forty percent of the jobs would be direct health care jobs at physicians' offices, hospitals, nursing centers, medical labs and home health care agencies, according to the report. Sixty percent would be indirect jobs in other sectors of the economy, due to multiplier effects.

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But the Legislature so far has rejected the state's plan to expand traditional Medicaid.

The Senate is working on alternative proposals, but the House has expressed reservations about taking the federal money at all.

A bill by Sen. Joe Negron, R-Palm City, has the support of senators, Gov. Rick Scott and the medical community. The legislation would create a state-based health insurance program that could make Florida eligible for the associated federal funding.

On Tuesday, Sen. Aaron Bean, R-Jacksonville, introduced a compromise plan that would subsidize low-income individuals, but would not make Florida eligible for the federal funds.

"I'm open to every good idea as long as it results in people getting health care," Rueben said.

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