

State senators want Medicaid recipients to stay healthy to get coverage

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Flanked by bushels of apples instead of high-calorie paczkis, Senate Republicans say Medicaid recipients should be required to lead healthier lifestyles as a condition for Medicaid benefits.

It's one way to get state health care costs under control, and to promote a generally healthier population, said Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, whose caucus will introduce legislation that also would expand health care coverage to low-income families.

Medicaid continues to consume about one-fourth of the state's general fund budget. Health advocates say nudging Medicaid recipients to stop smoking or get high cholesterol and blood pressure levels under control would save the state huge costs by avoiding more expensive medical treatments for heart-related diseases.

Sen. Tom George, R-Portage, said the bills would dovetail with Gov. Jennifer Granholm's proposal to expand state-paid health care to an additional 500,000 low-income people – a plan that must yet be approved by the federal government, which would pay a large portion of the cost.

The Senate plan would allow those who don't qualify for Granholm's subsidized health coverage to buy their own health insurance at a reduced rate.

George said the healthy lifestyle requirements would be determined by the state department of community health. He said it could include requiring Medicaid recipients to stop smoking, undergo health screenings, or get high cholesterol and high blood pressure under control through physician care.