

# Galveston County officials expand indigent health care program

By CHACOUR KOOP The Daily News | Posted: Tuesday, August 30, 2016 11:00 pm

Galveston County officials have widened the pool of poor people who can qualify for its indigent health care program.

The commissioners court voted unanimously Tuesday to expand the program to include residents who earn as much as 100 percent of the federal poverty level, which is \$11,800 a year for a single person, ranging to more than \$40,000 for households of eight and more.

Previously, people whose income was at or below 55 percent of the federal poverty level were eligible.

Galveston County is the “payer of last resort” for tertiary care — specialist and hospital visits — for poor, uninsured residents. Commissioners set the eligibility requirement for the program.

Commissioners have repeatedly floated the idea of changing the rules to open the indigent health care program to more people in the last year but have not taken a vote on the issue. Precinct 3 County Commissioner Stephen Holmes has been a longtime advocate for expanding the program.

“We’ve been hoping to get that,” Holmes said. “It’s good to see us get back to 100 percent, certainly for the residents of Galveston County who couldn’t otherwise afford health care.”

The indigent health care program is part of a state mandate for counties to help pay for the poorest residents’ health care after other options are tapped out.

In 2009, lawmakers agreed to fund \$150 million in repairs to the University of Texas Medical Branch caused by Hurricane Ike on the condition that the county would invest in its own indigent health care program.

As part of the agreement, commissioners imposed a 6 cent tax in 2009 and agreed to use the money to help create a hospital district or fund health coverage for more patients by including those who earned up to 100 percent of the federal poverty level.

Boon Chapman, a third-party administrator, estimated widening the eligibility requirement to 100 percent of the federal poverty level will cost about \$3 million and pay for 444 patients during the next budget year.

The county will spend about \$2 million on 286 patients in the current budget year.

Because the county has budgeted more than the money used, the indigent health care fund has about \$9 million.

## **2016 Federal Poverty Guidelines**

Household/100 percent amount

1 — \$11,880

2 — 16,020

3 — 20,160

4 — 24,300

5 — 28,440

6 — 32,580

7 — 36,730

8 — 40,890

For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,160 for each additional person.