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Health care plan could have merit

At first look, Gov. Bobby Jindal's plan for health care reform may be a good thing because it will make health care more accessible to people in St. Landry Parish who have trouble getting to the state's public hospitals.

The devil will be in the details and the governor's given us only an outline of his "Louisiana Health First" plan that would restructure the state's \$7 billion Medicaid program for the poor, elderly and disabled.

A quarter of Louisiana's more than 4 million residents are Medicaid recipients and the cost of the program is growing by leaps and bounds, as are all medical expenses across the nation.

Under the governor's plan, Medicaid recipients would chose a "coordinated care network," which would essentially be a group of public or private providers that could include community clinics, hospitals, health centers and doctors.

These providers would contract with the state and provide services at a pre-set negotiated price.

Supporters say the plan could save money for the state and give better care to many people because patients would avoid redundant testing, could receive preventive treatment that would keep them healthier, and give them a cheaper alternative than the emergency rooms that they now use.

The plan is far from a done deal, however. The federal government and the state legislature each have to approve it, in the face of opposition from some powerful doctor's groups such as the Louisiana State Medical Society and the state chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The doctors' current opposition stems from a lack of detail about the plan. They want to know more details about how "coordinated care networks" would be formed and how providers would get paid by them.

There is a lot yet to be decided about just how the plan will work, but we agree with the governor's observation that "our people deserve better. ... The health care system we've got today ...is not working to help the vary people it is designed to serve."

We, too, want to see more details. But we have long advocated finding a way to bring health care to the people rather than making them go to faraway clinics and hospitals.

The more accessible we make it, the more we will use it. The more we use it, the healthier we will be - and that will mean better things for the patients and for the taxpayers.
