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Medicaid expansion marks major change for commonwealth

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by Robert Powell

The biggest news in Virginia health care is the expansion of Medicaid coverage.

Expansion, which began Jan. 1, made Medicaid coverage available to an estimated 400,000 Virginians. By the beginning of the year, 200,000 had signed up.



The VCU Health System plans to build a \$350 million children's hospital in downtown Richmond. Courtesy VCU Health System

Medicaid coverage now is available to men and women ages 19 through 64 who are not eligible for Medicare and meet income requirements that vary with family size.

Virginia became the 33rd state to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare.

The move was the result of a compromise reached by the Virginia General Assembly last May to end a budget deadlock. The Republican-controlled legislature had previously rejected attempts at expansion for five years.

Meanwhile, many Virginia health systems are involved in major construction projects.

The Richmond-based Virginia Commonwealth University Health System, for example, announced in February that it plans to build an 86-bed, \$350 million inpatient children's hospital.

The facility in downtown Richmond will replace VCU's existing pediatric inpatient unit. The new hospital will offer private patient rooms and new operating rooms, imaging facilities and emergency services.

Construction will begin this spring and is scheduled to be completed in 2022.

In Northern Virginia, Fairfax-based Inova Health System is proceeding with plans to build a campus of up to 15 million square feet on the 117-acre former ExxonMobil corporate site it acquired in 2015.

Inova has been renovating existing buildings and plans to begin the first phase of new construction this year.

In Charlottesville, a \$394 million renovation and expansion of the U.Va. Medical Center is underway. The project will add 440,000 square feet and renovate another 95,000 square feet.

The work will expand the emergency department from 43 to about 80 beds and include dedicated space for mental health services. The project increases space for interventional services for patients needing surgeries or other procedures, including four new operating rooms. That portion of the work is scheduled to be completed by fall.

In Norfolk, work continues on the \$93.5 million Sentara Cancer Center. Construction, which began in March, is expected to be completed in 2020.

Health charts:

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