

Bryan Says Universal Healthcare Must Be Next Big Priority for Virgin Islands

Bryan emphasizes the need for universal health insurance and improved preventative care but suggests it will be up to the next governor to implement major reforms. Meanwhile, Fonseca pushes for a healthcare state of emergency.

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. says that the next big pressing issue the territory needs to solve is healthcare. “We are an overweight community; we suffer from high blood pressure, hypertension, diabetes, heart disease,” he noted [during an exclusive interview with the Consortium](#).

The current administration has implemented programs to promote holistic healthy living – “that's what we've been doing with our parks, making sure people get outside and get active, running

programs with our seniors and our young people,” Governor Bryan mentioned. However, the population continues to grapple with chronic health concerns.

An increased focus on preventative care is necessary, however timely and effective treatment for health ailments must be part of the strategy, Governor Bryan argued. The best way to accomplish this efficiently, he says, is by establishing a universal Virgin Islands health insurance plan. “If I could be governor for 16 years, you know that would have happened,” he declared.

The governor envisioned a system where Virgin Islanders would receive healthcare coverage at relatively nominal rates. “You would pay \$35 or \$50 a pay period, just like you're paying for health insurance, and that would cover you for your checkups, prescriptions, emergency care...because it behooves us to keep people healthy,” he suggested.

Beyond ensuring that residents receive proper healthcare, a territory-wide health insurance system could also help bridge the chronic funding gap faced by local hospitals, the governor argued. “With that, you could raise the \$30 million that the hospitals are short every year,” Governor Bryan stated. He further suggested that such a system could increase patient utilization of local healthcare facilities by designating them as preferred providers. “If you go to the hospital, you would probably pay a 10% co-pay,” Bryan explained, “but if you go to a private provider in the States, you would pay something like a 40% co-pay.”

On this idea, Governor Bryan has the concurrence of Senator Ray Fonseca, who chairs the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services in the 36th Legislature. However, while the governor sees tackling some of these healthcare issues as a longer term endeavor to be worked on perhaps by his successor in office, Sen. Fonseca is calling for a more immediate approach. The lawmaker has urged Governor Bryan to declare a [healthcare state of emergency](#), which among other things would allow for the designation of local hospitals as preferred providers, and allow the government to force the renegotiation of health insurance contracts on more favorable terms.