

Puerto Ricans Protest U.S. Healthcare Policies



San Juan, November 7 (RHC)-- Thousands of Puerto Ricans have taken to the streets against the U.S. government's inaction in the face of the Caribbean island nation's 'deteriorating and unfair' healthcare system.

The protests, organized by the newly formed Puerto Rico Healthcare Crisis Coalition, were joined by a U.S. delegation of legislators, healthcare advocates, labor leaders and civil rights activists to call attention to the worsening situation there.

Puerto Rico has been grappling with a federal funding gap for a long time now. The islanders pay the same Medicare and Social Security taxes as other Americans, but they receive half the Medicare and Medicaid rates.

The island's Medicaid program is currently capped, and receives up to 70 percent lower reimbursement rates than that of any of state. This is while more than two million (60 percent) of island residents rely on Medicaid, Medicare, or Medicare Advantage for their healthcare.

The Medicaid now funded by a federal grant is due to expire in 2017, according to Democratic Representative Nydia Velazquez.

The island is also likely to lose up to \$3 billion dollars in federal cuts within the next two years.

According to rally organizers, island doctors are also in contention with the current situation. They receive much lower reimbursement rates than their state-side counterparts and this prompts the Puerto Rican physicians to leave the island at an astonishing rate of nearly 400 annually, out of the total 11,000.

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