Tom Massey, office director of policy, communications and operations for the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, said the state’s decision to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act came down to math.

“We figured it would create about 20,000 more jobs over the next 20 years, bring in about $4.4 billion more into our economy and the average household earnings would rise by about $600,” said Massey, who spoke Monday during the CSG/CSG West Health Committee meeting.

Massey said before state policymakers decided to expand Medicaid last year and create a state-based insurance exchange, there were 800,000 residents out of a population of 5 million that did not have insurance. The first year has been a success.

“We have covered over 399,000 lives (with Medicaid and private insurance) in Colorado,” he said, “which is very significant in a one-year period.”

Massey said Gov. John Hickenlooper has focused his efforts on improving 10 winnable battles in public health. Increasing insurance coverage can help with a variety of those battles, such as infectious disease prevention, obesity, oral health and preventing unintended pregnancies.

Colorado has taken some strong steps toward those goals to create a healthier state. Medicaid now covers dental care and the legislature passed a program called Take 5 to ensure there are enough providers. The state, in conjunction with the Colorado Dental Association, will offer dentists $1,000 and hygienists $500 if they agree to take five new Medicaid patients and treat them at least twice in a 12-month period.

“We really want a client-centered focus on everything we do,” Massey said.