

Citizen Action of Wisconsin: Public health experts challenge Gov. Walker's forced drug testing for BadgerCare

Posted on Monday, Apr 17, 2017

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Statewide: In a media call this morning Citizen Action of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, and substance use disorder experts Dr Richard Brown and Jesse Heffernan raised concerns about Gov. Scott Walker proposed Medicaid waiver seeking permission from the Trump Administration to make a series of changes in the state's BadgerCare program. Listen to the entire media call [here](#).

Governor Walker's proposed [Section 1115 Demonstration Waiver](#), which will be submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services later this week, makes a series of changes in BadgerCare which apply to adults without minor children. These include charging premiums, requiring participation in job training programs, a 48 months on time limit on enrollment, and a requirement for drug use screening and testing.

The experts who spoke on the call argued that these change, if approved by the federal government, would force many low income Wisconsinites off BadgerCare without providing and viable alternative for access to health care. Although this might save money initially, it will be far more expensive for the state in the long run.

According to experts who spoke on the call, the drug testing proposal would be costly, impractical, and counterproductive.

“The whole idea is misguided. Depriving drug-addicted people of Medicaid will deprive them of high quality healthcare. This is the last thing we want during our current opioid epidemic,” said Dr. Rich Brown, founder of Wisconsin Initiative to Promote Healthy Lifestyle at UW School of Medicine “The Internet is full of guidance on how people who are using drugs can escape detection. Drug testing will likely not to identify most drug users and will be a total waste of time and money. Wisconsin already has many people on waiting lists to receive treatment. The longer people wait, the less likely they will actually end up in treatment. The \$48 million proposed for drug testing would be much better used to reduce wait times



for people who already want treatment.”

“Scott Walker is playing politics with the health and safety of people who need medical care the most. His forced drug testing proposal flies in the face of decades of medical science which has determined that substance use disorders are a disease not a moral failing,” said Robert Kraig, Executive Director of Citizen Action of Wisconsin. “If Walker was really interested in tackling the opioid epidemic and reduce substance use, he would fully fund voluntary prevention, screening, and treatment programs recommended by public health experts. Instead, he is playing on the worst stereotypes about people with substance use issues and all moderate income people who can’t afford to buy health coverage on their own.”

“The fact is we don’t even have the number of treatment beds in this state to handle a major influx of patients if people’s coverage is at risk,” said Jesse Heffernan, Certified Recovery Coach at Helios Addiction Coaching. “Governor Walker’s proposal perpetuates stigma and does not prioritize prevention. For someone who is actively using or seeking recovery, how can we expect them to pull themselves up by their bootstraps when they are facing a constant struggle. This is not the recipe to make someone a productive member of society again.”

“Walker’s proposed time limit on BadgerCare is likely to cut off people with chronic conditions. The proposal overall will likely lead to a less healthy workforce and much higher uncompensated care for hospitals,” said Jon Peacock, Research Director at Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. “This waiver will make Wisconsinites less healthy and will result in a smaller Wisconsin workforce.”