

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families: Medicaid supports Wisconsin's schools and children

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[Madison, Wisconsin] – Wisconsin's schools receive more than \$107 million in federal Medicaid funds each year, according to data released by the Washington, DC-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. That amount is higher than in all but six other states.

The Medicaid funding pays for health care services for many of the students with disabilities, such as mental health and speech therapy. It also covers vision and dental screenings provided in schools to Medicaid-eligible children, and helps schools connect low-income children to other health care services that aren't provided in schools, but are critical to a child's development.

"Medicaid plays a very important role in supporting students in Wisconsin's schools. Schools depend on these payments to help provide services like speech therapy, social work services, and personal care so students with disabilities can be successful at school." said Sally Flaschberger, Lead Advocacy Specialist at Disability Rights Wisconsin.

House Republicans tentatively plan to bring up a health bill this week, the American Health Care Act, which would cut federal Medicaid funding by \$839 billion over the next decade. In addition to putting health care at risk for millions of adults, these efforts would jeopardize critical health-related services for students and put an

important source of funds for schools and states at risk.

Jon Peacock, research director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, said federal cuts to Medicaid could be especially difficult for schools in Wisconsin. “Because our schools have done a good job of utilizing federal assistance to support school-based health services, we rank seventh highest nationally in federal Medicaid spending in schools.”

Medicaid provides health care for more than 1.1 million Wisconsinites, including about 500,000 children, but Peacock said many people are unaware of its significance for schools. That’s not the case for school nurses, who are well aware of Medicaid’s importance for schools, according to Valerie Hon, President of the Wisconsin Association of School Nurses.

“Without the support they get from Medicaid, some Wisconsin schools would struggle to afford keeping school nurses and other specialized instructional support personnel on staff, give students with disabilities the services they need and are entitled to receive, and provide basic screenings for Medicaid-eligible children,” Hon said. “Policymakers in Washington should protect Medicaid – not cut it.”

According to the new report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 68 percent of school superintendents reported earlier this year that they used Medicaid funding to keep school nurses, school counselors, speech therapists, and other health professionals on staff.

Peacock said the proposed changes in health care spending would have broader implications for schools. “Medicaid cuts are also likely to impede efforts to help schools implement proven reforms such as hiring and retaining excellent teachers, reducing class sizes, and expanding the availability of high-quality early education – keys to helping all children thrive in school.”

To learn more about how Medicaid helps schools, please visit:
<http://www.cbpp.org/research/health/medicaid-helps-schools-help-children>

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is a multi-issue policy research and advocacy organization promoting statewide policies that ensure a safe and healthy future for every child in Wisconsin. For more information, visit www.wccf.org.