

Citizen Action of Wisconsin: Legislative action on COVID-19 grossly inadequate

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Statewide: With the slow and uncoordinated federal response to the coronavirus pandemic paralyzing the country, the burden of leadership has fallen on state governments. Many states are stepping up to the task, and filling in as many gaps which should have been covered by the federal government as possible.

But legislative Republicans are blocking the emergency actions Wisconsin must take to slow the pandemic. This leadership malpractice will cost lives, and likely increase already appalling racial disparities in who dies during the pandemic. It will also move back the timeline for when Wisconites can safely go back to work, setting up a terrible choice between lives and economic livelihoods.

Of the many critical actions needed from the state government, [Citizen Action of Wisconsin has focused](#) on the need for free COVID-19 testing and treatment. Unless we remove the cost barriers to identify and treat the virus, we will never do the level of contact tracing and virus isolation that is needed to save lives and safely reopen the economy.

The Republicans in the Legislature this week blocked the advances towards free testing and treatment proposed by Governor Evers. The plan that passed the Assembly on Tuesday and the Senate early this afternoon does not include a

mandate of free COVID-19 treatment for private health plans, which can average \$10,000 to \$20,000 dollars, more if the patient needs intensive care. It also fails to give the Governor the flexibility to fully leverage BadgerCare to expand health coverage during the emergency to uninsured Wisconsinites. In addition, the plan does not limit the cancellation of health coverage during the pandemic, which will increase the ranks of the uninsured. It also leaves in place insurance deductibles for testing, creating a dangerous barrier to finding out who in Wisconsin is infected.

In a pandemic, the fear of financially crippling medical bills is a grave risk to the entire community because it discourages people from seeking care. A survey by Citizen Action and the Healthcare Value Hub found that nearly half of Wisconsinites have gone without needed medical care because of fear of the cost in the last year. A national study by the Commonwealth Fund found that 68% of Americans consider copays and deductibles important in determining whether or not they will seek COVID 19 treatment.

The overwhelming cost of health care, which is dangerous in normal times, is absolutely deadly during a pandemic because it is a barrier to universal testing and treatment needed to contain and isolate the virus. This is the only way to identify everyone who has been infected, and interrupt the deadly chains of disease transmission. The disparity in access to health care is one of the drivers of the appalling racial disparities in who is contracting the virus and who is dying.

There is an overwhelming consensus among public health experts that we must have a massive testing and treatment program to contain this virus and to begin to reopen the economy. We need to start by testing and treating everyone with symptoms, and do contact tracing to isolate those who are infected. This must include testing community-wide to identify seemingly healthy people spreading the virus.

“In a major crisis when lives and livelihoods are at stake, it is critical that elected

leaders step up to the scale of the challenge, said Robert Kraig, Executive Director of Citizen Action of Wisconsin. “It is deeply disturbing that Wisconsin Republicans have decided to hamstring Governor Evers, and depend on a federal administration which has already shown itself unable to rise to the task.” We need immediate emergency health care and economic policies which address the gravity of the situation, Kraig continued. “The COVID-19 pandemic focuses us on the reality that we are all interconnected, and that leaving people out of our healthcare system risks the lives of everyone in the community,”

For more detail on Citizen Action of Wisconsin’s COVID-19 policy proposals, see our March [news release](#) and [memo to the Governor](#), and a [column in early April](#).

Link to release <https://www.citizenactionwi.org/news/press-release/-legislative-action-on-covid-19-grossly-inadequate/>

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