

Protect Our Care: Medicare and Medicaid are more important than ever as the nation faces the coronavirus pandemic

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MILWAUKEE, WI — 55 years ago today, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Medicare and Medicaid into law, improving the well-being of millions of Americans and saving countless lives in the process. Yet Republicans continue to do everything they can to slash the budgets of these vital programs and kick millions of Americans off their coverage, even as the coronavirus crisis continues to grip the nation. To mark this important anniversary, Protect Our Care Wisconsin State Director Joe Zepecki issued the following statement:

“Five and a half decades in, Medicare and Medicaid serve as a lifeline for millions of Americans, especially as our country faces the worsening coronavirus pandemic. Meanwhile, Medicare and Medicaid remain under assault by President Trump and his Republican allies who have proposed steep budget cuts for both programs, support the disastrous lawsuit to eliminate Medicaid expansion entirely and continue fighting to impose onerous paperwork requirements for Medicaid coverage. Even as President Trump and Republicans’ never-ending war on health care rages on, Medicare and Medicaid continue to provide quality care for millions at a time when the health and safety of Americans has never been more at risk.”

BACKGROUND:

Trump Administration's War On Medicaid Threatens The U.S. Coronavirus Response

Trump Wants To Repeal Medicaid Expansion Through His Texas Lawsuit To Overturn The ACA. The Trump administration is currently backing a lawsuit to overturn the Affordable Care Act and, if they are successful, 20 million people would lose insurance and protections for pre-existing conditions would be eliminated overnight. The lawsuit would also terminate Medicaid expansion, threatening to rip away coverage from 17 million and cut key funding for already-struggling rural hospitals during the pandemic.

Trump Continues To Support Medicaid Block Grants. Under the Trump administration's recently finalized [block grant](#) proposal, federal funding would no longer necessarily increase in response to a public health emergency like coronavirus. This could lead to people losing coverage and access to care, undermining prevention and treatment of diseases nationwide.

Trump Paved The Way For Medicaid Work Requirements. The administration has encouraged states to impose illegal work requirements on Medicaid beneficiaries that are designed to throw people off coverage. When Arkansas imposed the nation's first work requirement program, [18,000 people lost coverage](#). The policy has since been struck down by the courts. While the federal government has temporarily [halted](#) any state efforts to impose new eligibility requirements that make it more difficult to enroll, including work requirements, states like [Oklahoma and Utah](#) are continuing to pursue Medicaid work requirements and other enrollment restrictions.

Trump Wants To Gut The Medicaid Budget. Trump has repeatedly sought deep health care cuts in his budget proposals, most recently seeking [more than a trillion in cuts](#) to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act for 2021. This budget essentially ends Medicaid expansion by [eliminating](#) the enhanced federal payment and proposes nationwide work requirements.

Who Gets Hurt From The GOP War On Medicaid?

Children & Families. Roughly [34.9 million](#) children in the United States are enrolled in Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Nationally, nearly 2 in 5, or 39% of children in America [have health insurance through Medicaid](#), as do [17 Percent](#) of parents. [49 percent](#) of births are covered by Medicaid.

Seniors. More than [6.9 million American seniors](#) have Medicaid coverage. More than [8.5 million Americans](#) ages 50 to 64 have health coverage through Medicaid. Medicaid covers [6 in 10 nursing home residents](#).

Women. Nearly [40 million women](#) and girls rely on Medicaid for coverage. In 2017, Medicaid covered [17% of nonelderly women](#) in the United States. Across all age groups, women comprise the majority of Medicaid enrollees.

People of Color. People of color are more likely to rely on Medicaid for coverage. Black Americans make up [13.4](#) percent of the U.S. population but [20 percent](#) of Medicaid enrollees. Latinos make up 18.3% of the U.S. population but [30 percent](#) of Medicaid enrollees. After the implementation of the ACA, racial gaps in insurance coverage [narrowed the most](#) in states that adopted Medicaid expansion.

People with Disabilities. Nearly [8.7 million adults](#) enrolled in Medicaid have a disability. Of this group, only 43 percent qualify for social security income. More than [1 in 3 adults](#) under age 65 enrolled in Medicaid lives with at least one disability. Medicaid covers [45 percent](#) of nonelderly adults with disabilities, including adults with physical disabilities, developmental disabilities, brain injuries, and mental illness.

People in Rural Areas. The ACA has expanded access to health care to nearly [1.7 million](#) rural Americans who have gained coverage through the Medicaid expansion, not only playing a central role in improving rural communities' health, but also supporting these communities' economic well-being. Medicaid covers nearly [24 percent](#) of rural Americans, [45 percent](#) of rural children, [15 percent](#) of rural seniors, and pays for [51 percent](#) of rural births. The uninsured rate in rural areas in states that expanded Medicaid has dropped by a median of [44 percent](#) since expansion.

Fighting the Opioid Crisis. [More than half](#) of people with an opioid use disorder earn incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty line. In 2014, Medicaid paid for [25 percent](#) of all addiction treatment nationwide. It is estimated that Medicaid expansion covers [four in ten](#) people with an opioid use disorder.

Here Are Some Of The Ways Republicans Have Undermined Medicare:

Trump Has Repeatedly Proposed Steep Cuts To Medicare In His Budget Requests. Despite [repeatedly promising](#) not to cut Medicare, Trump's 2020 budget proposal would have cut more than \$800 billion from Medicare over a decade, or

roughly [10 percent](#) of Medicare's funding over the next ten years to help pay for tax cuts to insurance and big drug companies. Most recently, Trump's 2021 budget would reduce Medicare spending by [\\$500 billion](#).

Trump And His Republican Allies Support A Lawsuit That Would Overturn The Entire ACA And Re-Open The "Donut" Hole, Forcing Seniors To Pay More For Prescription Drugs. If the Republican lawsuit is successful, seniors will have to pay more for prescription drugs because the Medicare "donut" hole got reopened. From 2010 to 2016, "More than 11.8 million Medicare beneficiaries have received discounts over \$26.8 billion on prescription drugs - an average of \$2,272 per beneficiary," according to a [January 2017 Centers on Medicare and Medicaid Services report](#).

As The Cost Of Drugs Skyrocket, President Trump And His Republican Allies In Congress Will Not Allow Medicare To Negotiate For Better Prescription Drug Prices. Under current law, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is explicitly prohibited from negotiating directly with drug manufacturers on behalf of Medicare Part D enrollees. Although

it would decrease both federal spending and beneficiaries' out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs, a policy allowing the federal government to negotiate drug prices for Medicare beneficiaries was recently blocked by Senate Republicans.