

# Protect Our Care: FACT SHEET: Medicaid benefits communities of color

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This April marks the 5th annual [Medicaid Awareness Month](#). Medicaid is an essential pillar in providing coverage for communities of color. Generations of structural racism have resulted in people of color experiencing lower rates of health coverage, worse health outcomes, and staggering health inequities. As a result, Medicaid coverage remains a critical source of coverage, especially for Black, Latino, and Indigenous families in America who experience poverty at a higher rate than white Americans and remain less likely to have access to quality care – an important driver of health. These groups also face higher rates of chronic conditions that make access to affordable health coverage even more essential. And for people of color who live in rural areas, who are LGBTQI+, who have a disability, or who are low income, these intersectional dimensions of their identities compound the health disparities they experience.

Research confirms that Medicaid expansion saves lives and [drastically reduces](#) racial/ethnic health disparities. States that expanded their Medicaid programs saw a [51 percent](#) reduction in the gap between uninsured white and Black adults after expansion, and a [45 percent](#) reduction between white and Hispanic/Latino adults. Despite Medicaid expansion's proven role in reducing racial/ethnic disparities in health care access and improving health outcomes, Republicans have spent years undermining the expansion of Medicaid, blocking millions from coverage. Currently, an estimated [2.1 million uninsured adults](#) are locked out of coverage in the [10 holdout states](#) refusing Medicaid expansion, with people of color comprising [62 percent](#) of those who would gain coverage if these 10 states expanded Medicaid.

By The Numbers

- **1 In 5 Medicaid Enrollees Are Black.** As of 2022, Black Americans make up [13.6 percent](#) of the U.S. population, but about [20 percent](#) of Medicaid enrollees.
- **About 1 in 4 Native American And American Indian People Are Enrolled In Medicaid.** According to the 2021 census, [4.3 million](#) people identified as Native American and American Indian. Nearly 27 percent of this group is enrolled in Medicaid.
- **30 Percent Of Medicaid Enrollees Are Hispanic/Latino.** Hispanic/Latino people make up [18.9 percent](#) of the U.S. population, but nearly [30 percent](#) of Medicaid enrollees.
- **15 Percent Of Asian Americans Are Enrolled In Medicaid.** Roughly [6 percent](#) of the American population identify as Asian American equating to about 21 million people.
- **More Than 30 Percent Of Native Hawaiian And Other Pacific Islanders (NHOPI) Are Covered By Medicaid.** That's about 207,000 out of 690,000 NHOPI people.
- **More Than 2.1 Million People Could Gain Coverage If Holdout States Accepted Expansion.** If Republicans did the right thing and expanded Medicaid in the remaining holdout states, [more than 2 million](#) uninsured adults could gain coverage; people of color make up [nearly 62 percent](#) of this group, or roughly 1.3 million people.

Research Confirms Medicaid Improves Coverage, Health, And Economic Equity

**Reduced Racial/Ethnic Disparities In Coverage.** Increasing Medicaid access is the single most important action available to expand coverage and address access to quality care as a driver of health. This together with additional actions to address other social and structural determinants of health can reduce racial/ethnic disparities in the American health care system. The majority of people in America who would [gain coverage](#) if the remaining 10 holdout states expanded Medicaid are people of color. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) led to historic reductions in racial/ethnic disparities in access to health care, but gaps in insurance coverage [narrowed the most](#) in states that adopted Medicaid expansion. States that expanded their Medicaid programs saw a [51 percent](#) reduction in the gap between uninsured white and Black adults after expansion, and a [45 percent](#) reduction between white and Hispanic/Latino adults.

**Medicaid Is Essential For Children Now And In The Future.** Children of color disproportionately rely on Medicaid coverage, making robust Medicaid access a

critical racial/ethnic justice issue for American children. Children of color make up [nearly 52 percent](#) of all American children, but [nearly 75 percent](#) of the children on Medicaid. This coverage not only provides health coverage in the immediate term, but also provides [significant long-term benefits](#), such as being less likely to be hospitalized and more likely to graduate high school and college.

**Medicaid Coverage Is Critical To Improving Maternal Health.** The United States is only one of two nations that has reported an [increase in maternal mortality](#) since 2000, including increases over the past [three years](#). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [more than 80 percent](#) of these deaths are preventable. Women of color consistently experience higher rates of maternal mortality than white women, with the Center on Budget Policy and Priorities finding this to be the result of a combination of factors, including life-long toxic stress resulting from racism and the impacts of [structural racism in the health care system](#). 30 states have expanded postpartum Medicaid coverage to a full year, covering [more than 460,000](#) individuals. In the 10 states that have refused Medicaid expansion, [eight](#) had more than 40 percent of births covered by Medicaid. Medicaid covers [65 percent](#) of all births to Black mothers and [65 percent](#) of women of reproductive age living in the coverage gap are women of color.

**Reduced Racial/Ethnic Disparities In Rural Access To Care.** [24 percent](#) of rural Americans identify as a person of color. Rural Americans of color face a greater health disparity than their white counterparts due to barriers to health care access, [reporting](#) not having primary care providers, forgoing care due to cost, and having fair to poor health status. States that have expanded Medicaid have [improved](#) rural hospital financial performance and lower likelihood of hospital closures. Residents in states where Medicaid has been expanded are more likely to receive higher quality care, including for chronic health conditions, such as [diabetes](#) and [hypertension](#) that disproportionately impact communities of color. When Arkansas and Kentucky accepted Medicaid expansion, adults in those states became [more likely](#) to have a personal doctor, obtain care for ongoing conditions, and have a yearly medical check up.

**LGBTQI+ People of Color Have Seen Reduced Health Disparities.** Due to both systemic factors as well as [complex familial dynamics](#), the LGBTQI+ community is much more [at risk](#) of poverty and uninsurance than cisgender heterosexual Americans. Because of this, Medicaid has become a lifeline for the LGBTQI+ community, especially people of color. Around [79 percent](#) of Black LGBTQI+ Americans and [67 percent](#) of Latino LGBTQI+ Americans with incomes

below 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Line qualify for Medicaid. As well, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) LGBTQI+ Americans are over [two times](#) as likely to have Medicaid as their primary insurance compared to cisgender heterosexual AAPI individuals.

**Medicaid Improves Financial Security For Families.** The racial/ethnic wealth gap in America is staggering. According to data from the US Census Bureau, in 2020, the annual median household income for white Americans was nearly [\\$20,000](#) higher than for Hispanic/Latino households and nearly [\\$30,000](#) higher compared to Black households. As a result, policies to boost financial well-being undoubtedly help people of color. The bottom 10th percentile of earners in Medicaid expansion states saw a [22.4 percent](#) boost in their income, compared to 11.4 percent in non-expansion states. Over the past decade, research has shown the gap in medical debt between Medicaid expansion and holdout states has grown approximately [30 percent](#). In 2020, Americans living in holdout states carried an average of [\\$375](#) more in medical debt than their counterparts in expansion states.

**Medicaid Reduces Poverty And Inequity.** Poverty can produce negative long-term consequences for [children](#) and adults alike. Medicaid has long been considered one of the most effective [anti-poverty](#) programs in the nation, and its expansion has significantly [improved](#) health outcomes for people of color. In a nation where out-of-pocket health care spending forced more than [10 million](#) Americans into poverty in 2016 alone, Medicaid serves as a lifeline not only for health care, but for economic stability. A January 2021 [study](#) from Health Affairs found that the ACA helped reduce income inequality across the board, but much more dramatically in Medicaid expansion states.

**Medicaid Helps Those Dealing With Behavioral Health Conditions.** States that have expanded Medicaid have added [behavioral health benefits](#), including mental health and substance use disorder care, that particularly benefit beneficiaries of color who have disproportionately been affected by these conditions. [Nearly 9 million](#) Latinos, 6.8 million Black people, over 2 million AAPI, and 830,000 Native Americans and Alaskan Natives suffer from a mental health disorder. Medicaid is the single-largest payer for mental health services in America, serving [26 percent](#) of all adults living with a serious mental health condition. It is also an important source of coverage for substance use disorder services.