



Medicaid

A W A R E N E S S R E P O R T

Let's Expand On That:
Medicaid Expansion Has Made
America Healthier But GOP Sabotage
Threatens Those Gains

PROTECT
OUR CARE

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Let's Expand On That: Medicaid Expansion Has Made America Healthier But GOP Sabotage Threatens Those Gains

Republicans have been waging a war on health care for years. Even after their repeal and sabotage agenda fueled a Democratic majority in the U.S. House of Representatives, Republicans continue to do all they can to undermine the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Medicaid, and our entire health care system.

Their actions have, and will continue to have real consequences for real people. Take the latest assault: a lawsuit backed by the Trump administration and the GOP to void the entire ACA, eliminating tax credits to lower premiums, protections for people with pre-existing conditions, and Medicaid expansion. A federal district court judge has already ruled the entire law should be overturned. If that decision stands, Americans will see higher costs and worse coverage, and millions enrolled in Medicaid will lose their insurance.

This partisan, ideological war on health care Republicans are waging fails to account for the real benefits people across the country are experiencing. Take, for example, Medicaid expansion. In the last two years alone, we have evidence that clearly shows better health outcomes for people who live in states that expanded Medicaid compared to those who live in states that did not. Whether it is cancer treatment, maternal health, reducing racial health disparities, treating heart disease and diabetes, combating the opioid epidemic, or mortality rates in general; the bottom line is that people who live in states that expanded Medicaid experience better care than those who do not.

It is not just the Trump lawsuit that threatens our health care. The Trump administration and Republicans in states across the country are using onerous regulations and red tape to kick people off Medicaid coverage. In several states that recently voted to expand Medicaid, Republican governors and legislatures are trying to overturn the will of the people and stop expansion from being implemented. The Trump administration is also pushing “junk” insurance plans that allow insurance companies to offer skimpy coverage and discriminate against people with pre-existing conditions. And they are rolling back protections for women and the LGBTQ community.

Republicans need to be held accountable until they end their attack on our health care. People's lives are on the line.

Medicaid Expansion: An Overview

The Affordable Care Act opened the door for states to expand Medicaid, enabling people with incomes up to 138 percent of the federal poverty line to sign up for coverage. In the time since, 36 states and the District of Columbia have expanded their Medicaid programs, enabling nearly 12.7 million newly eligible people to gain coverage.

States that have chosen to expand Medicaid have seen significant reductions in their uninsured rates. Between 2013 and 2017, the uninsured rate in Medicaid expansion states dropped by 6.7 percent — from 15.8 percent to 9.1 percent. During the same time period, the uninsured rate in states that refused to expand Medicaid dropped by only 4.3 percent. At 15.9 percent, the uninsured rate in non-expansion states remains more than 6 percent higher than the uninsured rate in states that expanded their programs.

Perhaps this is why Medicaid expansion remains so popular: about three-fourths of the public have a favorable view of Medicaid. Last fall, voters in three conservative states voted to expand Medicaid. More than 60 percent of voters in Idaho chose to expand Medicaid, as did more than 53 percent in Nebraska and Utah.

Medicaid Expansion Helps People Gain Coverage, Improves Health

By helping people gain coverage, choosing to expand Medicaid helps communities access both preventive care and life-saving treatment. Study after study has shown Medicaid expansion to be associated with better health outcomes.

Improving Maternal Health

Medicaid is a lifeline for children and families — playing an especially important role for babies and new mothers. Nearly fifty percent of births nationwide are covered by Medicaid, and recent studies show that Medicaid expansion helps improve the health of new moms and babies and improves access to family planning.

Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families has reviewed the ways Medicaid expansion fills gaps in maternal health, finding it increases access to preventive care and reduces adverse health outcomes before, during, and after pregnancy. Research presented at the AcademyHealth National Health Policy Conference in May 2019 found that Medicaid expansion was associated with lower rates of maternal mortality. The research also found that states that had expanded Medicaid experienced 1.6 fewer maternal deaths per 100,000 women than states that had refused to expand Medicaid.

In addition to reducing maternal mortality, Medicaid expansion has also been associated with a significant reduction in infant mortality. A study published in the American Journal of Public Health in April 2018 found that the decline in infant mortality was more than 50 percent greater in states that expanded Medicaid, compared to those that did not.

Beyond improving health surrounding childbirth, Medicaid expansion improves access to family planning. A University of Michigan study found that one-third of women enrolled in Michigan's expanded Medicaid program reported that their coverage improved access to birth control and family planning services. Michelle Moniz, M.D., M.Sc., the study's lead author, concluded that her team's findings "suggest that the expansion provided an important service for populations with a high unmet need for family planning care."

Reducing Racial Disparities

Medicaid expansion has proven to be a potent tool for reducing racial disparities in health care. Black babies are twice as likely as white babies to be born at low birth weight and are 1.5 times as likely to be born prematurely. One study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) in April 2019 found when considering low birth weight and preterm birth outcomes overall, Medicaid expansion was associated with "significant improvements in relative disparities for black infants compared with white infants in states that expanded Medicaid vs those that did not."

Similarly, researchers have also found that the gap in rates at which African American and white patients receive early cancer treatment has been nearly eliminated in states that have expanded Medicaid. Research released at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology identified that before the Affordable Care Act, African Americans with advanced cancer were 4.8 percentage points less likely than their white counterparts to start treatment for their disease within 30 days of diagnosis. In states that expanded Medicaid, that gap has been almost completely eliminated.

Comparable trends also emerged in a Drexel University study on Medicaid expansion and kidney transplants. Drexel researchers found that Medicaid expansion was associated with larger increases in Medicaid coverage among new listings of racial and ethnic minority kidney disease patients compared to listings of white patients. This difference “suggests that Medicaid expansion may have helped to curb racial and socioeconomic disparities in pre-dialysis chronic kidney disease care.”

Expanding Access To Treatment For Opioid Use Disorder

Multiple studies suggest that Medicaid expansion plays a crucial role in improving access to treatment for opioid use disorder. A February 2018 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) analysis of data from the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality found that Medicaid expansion dramatically reduced the share of opioid-related hospitalizations in which patients were uninsured. CBPP found: “the share of hospitalizations in which the patient was uninsured fell dramatically in states that expanded Medicaid: from 13.4 percent in 2013 (the year before expansion took effect) to just 2.9 percent two years later.”

In addition to reducing the share of uninsured opioid-related hospitalization, studies suggest that Medicaid expansion increases access to medication-assisted treatment. An August 2018 study published in JAMA found that Medicaid expansion “significantly increased” the rate of buprenorphine and naloxone prescriptions, “suggesting that expansion improved access to opioid use disorder treatment.” The authors noted that expansion did not increase the rate of prescriptions in general, but rather that it increased the rate of prescriptions paid for by Medicaid.

A February 2019 report from the Urban Institute yielded similar findings: an increase in access to treatment, “especially in expansion states.” The study found that between 2013 and 2017, “Medicaid spending on prescriptions for the treatment of [opioid use disorder] and overdose increased more than 2.5-fold in states that had expanded Medicaid between late 2014 and 2016, while spending in non-expansion states increased 1.7-fold.”

Improvements In Disease-Specific Diagnosis And Treatment

From diabetes to cancer, Medicaid expansion has been associated with improved access to preventive care, coverage, and treatment for chronic diseases.

- **Higher rates of colon cancer screening:** A study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine in May 2019 found that the rate of colon cancer screenings among low-income adults increased substantially more in states that were very early adopters of Medicaid expansion than in states that chose not to expand. The study found that the rate of colon cancer screening increased by 8 percentage points (from 30.1 percent to 38.1 percent) in very early adoption states, compared to 2.8 points in non-expansion states (from 29.1 percent to 31.8 percent). Had the rate been the same for non-expansion states as it was for those states that expanded Medicaid early, the study predicts 355,184 additional people would have been screened.

- **Improved cardiovascular health:** Recent research has found Medicaid expansion to be associated with higher rates of coverage for heart attack patients and fewer heart-related deaths, the leading cause of death in the United States. Research from Northwestern University published in JAMA in August 2018 found that states that had expanded Medicaid had “a significantly greater reduction” in the proportion of uninsured hospitalizations for cardiovascular events compared with states that had refused to expand Medicaid. Research from the University of Pennsylvania appearing in JAMA in June 2019 has built on this research, finding that counties in Medicaid expansion states had 4.3 fewer deaths per 100,000 residents each year from cardiovascular causes after expansion than if they had followed the same trends as counties in non-expansion states.
- **Access to diabetes medication:** More than 100 million U.S. adults have diabetes, and research suggests that Medicaid expansion may improve access to diabetes medication. A Health Affairs study published in August 2018 found a 40 percent increase in the number of prescriptions filled for diabetes drugs in Medicaid programs of states that expanded Medicaid in 2014 and 2015, compared to prior years. States that refused to expand Medicaid saw no notable increase in prescriptions filled.
- **Access to kidney transplants:** A June 2018 Drexel University study appearing in the Clinical Journal of the American Society of Nephrology (CJASN) found Medicaid expansion was associated with a dramatic increase in preemptive listings for kidney transplants. Researchers found that states that fully implemented Medicaid expansion on January 1, 2014 had a 59 percent relative increase in Medicaid-covered preemptive listings from the pre-expansion to post-expansion period, compared with an 8.8 percent relative increase among Medicaid non-expansion states.

Yet, Republicans Are Doing Almost Everything In Their Power To Take Away People’s Medicaid

Despite study after study linking Medicaid expansion to increased coverage, access to preventive care, and better health outcomes, the Trump administration and Republicans across the country remain intent on decimating the program.

In 2017, Congressional Republicans proposed numerous bills to slash Medicaid funding. In the Senate, the Graham-Cassidy bill would have cut Medicaid by more than \$1 trillion over 20 years and completely ended Medicaid expansion. In July 2017, all but three Senate Republicans voted for the “Better Care Reconciliation Act”, which would have cut Medicaid by \$842 billion by 2026. In May 2017, House Republicans passed their notorious repeal bill, the “American Health Care Act,” which would have cut \$834 billion from Medicaid over 10 years, effectively ending the program’s expansion.

Following these failed attempts to slash Medicaid funding, President Trump and Congressional Republicans passed a massive \$1.5 trillion tax cut in 2017. To pay for these tax cuts, Republicans have suggested they will need to decimate public health programs like Medicaid.

In 2017, then-Speaker Paul Ryan made the GOP’s priorities on cuts to Medicaid clear: “Frankly, it’s the health care entitlements that are the big drivers of our debt, so we spend more time on the health care entitlements — because that’s really where the problem lies, fiscally speaking.”

Then, in his fiscal year 2019 budget, President Trump requested \$1.4 trillion in cuts to Medicaid — attempting to strip health care from millions of low-income Americans to pay for tax cuts for the rich. For the second year in a row, President Trump has requested massive cuts to Medicaid. In his FY 2020 budget, Trump requested \$1.5 trillion in cuts to Medicaid and proposed capping the program and implementing a nationwide Medicaid work requirement.

Now, the Trump administration and its Republican allies are tirelessly pursuing back-door ways of demolishing Medicaid that dodge Congressional approval. President Trump has joined attorneys general and governors from twenty conservative states to argue in court that the entire Affordable Care Act, including its Medicaid expansion be completely eliminated.

In addition to trying in court, the Trump administration is also working to change the fundamental structure of the program by preventing people from accessing coverage through Medicaid if they fail to document working a certain number of hours each month. The administration is doing this by urging states to impose bureaucratic paperwork requirements on Medicaid coverage. Experts warn that imposing such requirements could significantly reduce Medicaid enrollment by adding administrative hurdles that make it harder for people to access care. Already, more than 18,000 people in Arkansas have lost coverage due to an Arkansas requirement that was recently struck down in federal court.

Similarly, the Trump administration is trying to push states to block-grant their Medicaid programs, a move that would cut federal funding, shift costs to states, and has the potential to strip Medicaid from millions.

In states where voters have taken the matter into their own hands by electing to expand Medicaid, Republican state officials are attempting to defy voters' will by imposing unnecessary restrictions on Medicaid. In Utah, after voters cast ballots to expand Medicaid, state leaders refused to fully expand the program and are now attempting to limit Medicaid by imposing per capita caps on coverage. In Nebraska, Republicans have opted to delay implementation of the voter-approved Medicaid expansion and add a complex tiered Medicaid system in a direct affront to the will of voters. In Idaho, where voters also elected to expand Medicaid, Republicans have approved only partially expanding the program and imposing onerous work requirements designed to stymie enrollment.

Conclusion

As study after study has shown, expanding Medicaid means better health care for millions of people. It is one of the most successful components of an increasingly popular Affordable Care Act. Yet, Republicans continue their unwavering zeal to rip these benefits away. We have a choice: we can continue to find ways to expand and improve coverage and lower costs, or we can continue the Republican war on health care that threatens these benefits. For better health care, the choice is clear.

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