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Written by: Ciriac Alvarez Valle



Last week the Utah Legislature accepted \$1.7 billion (yes, billion) in federal COVID relief funds through the American Rescue Plan Act. Legislators have stated plans to allocate these funds towards Utah's biggest challenges and opportunities. As a state, one of our biggest challenges is the number of Utahns unable to access health insurance, care and health information. But we also have a unique opportunity to change the trajectory for Utah families, to not only recover in the short-term, but to ensure all Utahns are on a path toward better health care and coverage into the future.

How can the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding help support improved health coverage and care for Utah kids? Read on to learn about the challenges and the opportunities to address them!

Challenge and Opportunity #1: Ensure All Utah Kids Can Access Health Insurance

- **Cover All Kids:** Utah has one of the highest rates of uninsured children in the nation. We rank 46th (worst) in the nation when it comes to ensuring kids. Over 82,000 children lack health insurance. Even more troubling, this number has grown by 39% over the last three years. But through smart ARPA

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investments, we can reverse this trend. Utah can now adopt state policies that would allow more children to get covered and *keep* their coverage. The ARPA is estimated to save at least [\\$72 million in General Funds, from enhanced federal Medicaid dollars alone.](#) Utah can use these savings to leverage investments ensuring all Utah children have health coverage.

Challenge and Opportunity #2: Strengthen Programs that Help Children's Healthy Development

- **Social emotional screening services and support:** Many children missed out on important visits to their pediatrician during the pandemic. Children have missed out on immunizations and preventive care. Now we begin the work of getting our kids back on track and addressing the social-emotional backslide we know many experienced during the pandemic. We need to strengthen our systems of assessment and screening to help kids who might otherwise fall through the cracks. ARPA funds can help upgrade health systems and improve care coordination for Utah's youngest.
- **Extend postpartum coverage:** An important provision of the American Rescue Plan Act makes it easier for states to adopt a policy that will help women stay insured during their postpartum period. This provision would guarantee pregnant women enrolled in Medicaid could maintain coverage 12 months after the birth of a child, instead of 60 days. When mothers have consistent, uninterrupted coverage and care, they are better able to care for their newborn and navigate the ups and downs of the postpartum year. Utah can submit a Medicaid state plan amendment to the federal government to make these changes.

Challenge and Opportunity #3: Invest in Greater Language Access and Data Collection Reflective of Utah Communities

- **Ensure all communities have easy access to public health information in their primary language:** The pandemic underscored the need for all Utahns to be able to access trusted information to stay safe. Utah can ensure all public-facing information be accessible in multiple languages and dispel misinformation related to the public charge rule. ARPA funds can be used to build greater language accessibility and Information channels for all Utahns.

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- **Invest in state and local agencies' ability to collect, standardize and publish data outlining differential impacts of health outcomes based on race, ethnicity and language:** The Utah Department of Health, Office of Health Disparities, has been a leader in reporting critical health equity data. ARPA funds are an important opportunity for more state and local agencies to be equipped with the tools and resources necessary to disaggregate data and unmask hidden health disparities in order ensure the most effective responses and resource allocation. Utah can and must do more to report access and outcome data disaggregated by race, ethnicity and language.

Challenge and Opportunity #4: Increase Access to School Based Care & Healthy Schools

- **Strengthen access to school-based health care, including school nurses and mental health professionals:** Schools are critical places for children to access care. They will be especially important to help children stay on track in fall 2021. Smart investments in school-based health services such as continued support for tele-mental health, increased coordination and support, and more school nurses will help kids stay healthy so they can have better academic success. Across Utah, school staff report the following as top needs for their students: 1) mental and behavioral health; 2) access to preventive screening including dental and vision. ARPA funds can help meet these needs.
- **Fund health-promoting infrastructure improvements to schools, including lead-safe drinking water and air filtration systems:** Let's not miss this critical opportunity to make our schools healthy environments.

These investments will have a **profound, multi-generational impact on Utahns**. This year we saw the devastating effects when some families cannot obtain health insurance and are forced to delay care; we witnessed the damage that can occur when communities experience limited access to health care. We now have a chance to fix this, to mend what is broken and remove barriers for those shut out, so that all Utahns can reach their full potential.