What do Utahns Think About the Proposed Changes to Medicaid and PCN?

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Written by: Questions?



Recently the Healthier Utah Coalition 'Save Medicaid Campaign' put together a survey to get public feedback on the Utah Department of Health's proposed changes to its Medicaid program. The proposed amendments to the Medicaid and Primary Care Network (PCN) included controversial program changes such as lifetime caps on coverage, work requirements, and $25 copays for 'inappropriate' use of the ER. The proposed amendments would also eliminate presumptive eligibility in Medicaid and reverse an earlier Department of Health decision to restore comprehensive benefits to 19 and 20-year-old youth.

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Save Medicaid Utah
Healthier Utah Coalition
Updated to Reflect August 2017 Changes

PROPOSED MEDICAID CHANGES

Governor Herbert and the Department of Health are proposing sweeping changes to Utah's Medicaid program. What will these changes mean for Utahns?

People Will Lose Health Insurance Coverage

The proposal puts limits on the length of time enrollees can receive care, creates more red tape and increases costs for enrollees. As a result, many vulnerable Utahns could lose access to the critical care they need.



Individuals & Parents Will be Caught in a Poverty Cycle

Medicaid time limits will cause low-income Utahns to lose the benefits that enable them to work in the first place. New work requirements do little to make individuals and parents more self-sufficient, since most low-wage jobs do not offer health insurance. Making the ER more expensive may cause enrollees to delay treatment and make future care more costly. Together, the requirements are likely to continue the cycle of poverty.



Utahns Will be Less Healthy

Causing people to lose coverage will leave many without the care they need to stay healthy. Time limits mean people with chronic conditions will eventually go without care. Increased requirements and penalties for using the ER may mean some people miss out on critical care. When all is said and done, poor Utahns will likely be in worse health.



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The Utah Department of Health held two public meetings at its Salt Lake City office in the summer. The Coalition's survey was an attempt to reach a wider audience across the state, and walk through each amendment for those less familiar with the proposed waiver. We modeled the survey after a similar one developed by fantastic advocates in Kentucky. Survey responses were also sent to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, during their federal waiver comment period (if the respondent granted permission).

So, what did we learn?

Over 350 people took the survey. Survey respondents came from across Utah and all walks of life:

- Over half of respondents (58%) reported being either on Medicaid or PCN, or have a family member on Medicaid or PCN.
- The majority of respondents were between the ages of 30- 69.
- Over half of respondents (54%) were working less than 31 hours/ week. They reported working part-time, as a caregiver, or reported being retired, disabled or a student.
- 50% of respondents came from Salt Lake County, followed by Utah (11%), Davis (10%), Weber (8%), Washington (6%), Cache (3%), Iron (2%), and Box Elder (2%). Only six counties did not have any survey respondents: Daggett, Garfield, Juab, Kane, Morgan, and San Juan.

How did respondents feel about the proposed changes?

Overall, the proposed Medicaid changes were very unpopular. The most unpopular changes were imposing lifetime limits on PCN or Medicaid coverage. Interestingly, the option to impose ER penalties had the most support, although the majority of respondents still opposed it.

- 91% were against time limits on coverage
- 75% were opposed to work requirements
- 53% were opposed to ER penalties
- 87% opposed to eliminating presumptive eligibility

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- 90% opposed eliminating comprehensive benefits for 19 and 20-year-old's

A few of the comments from respondents:

"As a care taker for my elderly mother, I have been in this position for nearly a decade and my part time income is always below FPL, yet I cannot get inclusion into PCN because I have no children…. No one seems to be addressing people in my situation at all."

"I am concerned that my adult daughter with significant health care issues may lose the critical coverage that she needs to sustain quality of life and even life itself."

"Many of the families I work with cannot afford $25 dollars [for an ER copay]. Paying this much as a co-pay would mean they do not eat."

"[Without Medicaid] I would have died from cancer by now. I'm 41. I have so many prescriptions for my illnesses, I would be bankrupt and homeless, relying on hand outs. Now I have a part time job, housing I can pay rent and utilities bc my medical is covered. I know hundreds of people in my community who are receiving mental health care like myself. It's the best around. I am grateful daily as I am healthy only bc I have adequate health services. I can't imagine if I didn't. I would suffer severely. Many Utahns are in the same situation."

For 30 years now, Voices for Utah Children has called on our state, federal and local leaders to put children's needs first. But the work is not done. The children of 30 years ago now have children of their own. Too many of these children are growing up in poverty, without access to healthcare or quality educational opportunities.

How can you be involved?

Make a tax-deductible donation to Voices for Utah Children—or join our Network with a monthly donation of $20 or more. Network membership includes complimentary admission to Network events with food, socializing, and opportunity to meet child advocacy experts. And don't forget to join our listserv to stay informed!

We look forward to the future of Voices for Utah Children and we hope you will be a part of our next 30 years.

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