What Does the Coronavirus Mean for Families' Access to Health Care?

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A Look at How Utah Programs are Responding to the Coronavirus and Additional Actions Needed (UPDATED with new information about CHIP!)

From prenatal care to childhood vaccinations, the Coronavirus is disrupting access to health care for countless Utah kids and families. Our Governor and state agencies have been working hard to roll out an immediate health care plan to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Utah Department of Health has taken several important changes to help impacted families get health coverage and stay covered. Some recent changes include:

Suspending Medicaid Work Requirements: The Department of Health has indefinitely suspended harmful Medicaid work reporting requirements, which went into effect in January. This is positive news for families, so parents can enroll in

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coverage without additional red tape and reporting requirements. We applaud the Governor and Department of Health for choosing to suspend these requirements and urge them to make this is a permanent change.

Ensuring No One Can Lose Medicaid Coverage During the Pandemic: In order to receive enhanced federal Medicaid funding during the crisis, states are not allowed to dis-enroll anyone from Medicaid (unless the enrollee requests such a change). Families can enroll in Medicaid and be guaranteed consistent coverage throughout the duration of the pandemic. In addition, Utah's youngest kids will be guaranteed continuous coverage even after the state of emergency is lifted, thanks to recent actions by the Utah Legislature.

Enhanced Telehealth Capacity: Utah Medicaid has been a leader in telehealth innovations, ensuring coverage and payment parity for telehealth visits. The state continues to take proactive steps to ensure Utah patients and health care providers have access to virtual care. Learn more about Medicaid telehealth.

Virtual Home Visiting and Early Intervention: Support for new moms and young children remains critical. Fortunately, Utah home visiting programs are continuing to support new mothers through tele -visits and virtual platforms, which will help some new mothers in need of services. In addition, Baby Watch early intervention programs are also using virtual platforms to help young children with developmental delays or disabilities.

Protecting Kids Enrolled in CHIP: This just in: the Department of Health confirmed that Utah will be **temporarily suspending CHIP premiums.** This is good news for the 16,000+ kids enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program. Kids on CHIP will *not* lose coverage due to failure to pay CHIP premiums. We applaud the Department of Health for ensuring that CHIP kids' coverage is protected, similar to kids on Medicaid.

But Some Utahns are Still Left Out.

Unfortunately, many Utahns are still at risk of not being able to access care. Listed are several immediate, additional actions that are needed to ensure ALL Utahns can get the care they need:

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Ensure all immigrants can access health care now. If one person is sick and afraid to seek care, entire communities are at risk. We urge the Governor and Department of Health to ensure that immigrant families, regardless of their citizenship status, can obtain affordable health care. Recommendations:

- Immediately ensure all Utahns can access COVID-19 medical evaluation and treatment, regardless of their citizenship status. Unfortunately, some individuals are only eligible for COVID-19 testing, *but cannot get follow-up treatment or care if they test positive*. This gap in care puts everyone at risk. No one should be denied the treatment they need.
- Provide public information so that families know that receipt of COVID-19 testing or other health care services will not be considered a negative factor in the public charge determination.
- Ensure health care testing and treatment facilities have the capacity to provide linguistically appropriate information and resources. Language barriers should not keep families from getting the care they need.
- Request federal authority to allow eligible legal permanent residents to enroll in Medicaid and CHIP, without a five-year waiting period, including pregnant women.
- Ensure all Utah children have health coverage regardless of their status.

Help families know about Medicaid and CHIP. Ensure families feel welcome and safe getting the care they need. Many families do not know that Medicaid and CHIP are available to help them access care. We need widespread, culturally and linguistically appropriate information about our health care safety net programs, so affected families can quickly get back on their feet. Recommendations:

- Public officials should make statements encouraging Utahns to seek out and apply for public medical insurance benefits. This will help address the stigma and fear that some families feel when it comes to enrolling.
- Dedicate resources for targeted, culturally and linguistically appropriate Medicaid and CHIP public awareness and outreach; coordinate with managed care organizations to assist in letting the public know about the availability of Medicaid coverage.

What Lies Ahead?

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We know more work is needed to support Utahns' physical and mental health. Let's ensure kids are still able to get the critical, **early childhood care** they need, including vaccinations and developmental screenings. We also need to make sure we dedicate resources to **mental health** support including **maternal and perinatal mental health**, and expand tele mental health services. Finally, we must strengthen **school-based health care**, so schools are ready to support students' physical and mental health needs of students in the fall.

Our health care system has been under enormous pressures in recent weeks. We have seen Utahns come together as one, but we have also seen the disparities and gaps that exist within our current system. In the coming weeks, we will be watching for additional health policy changes and providing additional recommendations to support the physical, mental and emotional well-being of Utah kids and families.

If you want to apply for Medicaid or help others find out about affordable health insurance options, you can apply online or call 2-1-1 for more information.

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