https://www.wvgazettemail.com/opinion/op_ed_commentaries/candice-lefeber-medicaid-cuts-put-our-children-at-risk-opinion/article_25646894-453f-4db5-b86f-cd8b8533e5f9.html

Candice Lefeber: Medicaid cuts put our children at risk (Opinion)

By Candice Lefeber
Apr 11, 2025

Candice Lefeber

As the executive director of the West Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, an organization that represents 147 health care professionals across the state who serve children, and a mom of three myself, I have grave concerns on the far-reaching impacts for West Virginia's youth and the state should Medicaid cuts be implemented.

The issue is particularly relevant in our state, where over 500,000 residents, or approximately 30% of our state, rely on Medicaid to help them obtain access to health care. Over 200,000 children, or around 40%, are on Medicaid/CHIP.

Health coverage is an essential foundation to support well-being. However, that coverage is at stake for millions of people. Congress is considering proposals to pay for an extension of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, including extensive budget cuts to Medicaid, ranging from $880 billion to $2.3 trillion.

These cuts would be devastating to West Virginia's most vulnerable populations. Congress needs to act to prevent any Medicaid cuts.

$48,980
Shop Now
VIN: 1FTEW1EPXMKD30139
STOCK#: 21A23
2021 Ford F-150

Families cannot bear the financial burden of potentially losing coverage due to Medicaid cuts. What would be at stake for children's health if Medicaid is cut? Children with chronic conditions, like cancer, would be particularly at risk without access to treatments and regular medical support. As noted by the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, one in three children who are bravely battling cancer are enrolled in Medicaid. One in five children that receive a cancer diagnosis are facing housing, food or utility insecurity.

The reverberations of cuts to Medicaid would be felt across the state, leaving no residents untouched. Nearly 477,000 individuals employed in the health care industry could lose their jobs. This would further exacerbate an already stretched thin health care workforce in the state, which has 14% and 19% shortage of physicians and nurses, respectively.

Staffing shortages might lead to closures of facilities that West Virginians rely on for care. Perhaps the most drastic impact would be felt in rural parts of the state, which are home to the vast majority, or two-thirds, of our residents. Children in rural areas are more dependent on Medicaid coverage and 36% of hospitals are already at risk of closing.

Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), which aim to help underserved communities, are at risk given their federal funding. FQHCs provide one in three West Virginians with access to health care, and closures would hit our rural communities the hardest.

Beyond the health care workforce and facility impacts, access to health care is vital, especially for children because a healthy start sets children up for success. Coverage allows them to be more present and do better in school, be more likely to graduate and even eventually earn higher wages in their careers. We can all agree that our children deserve the best chance at a successful life, and it's not only their access to health care, but their future on the line.

$53,893
Certified Pre-Owned 2024 Volvo XC60
Recharge Plug-In Hybrid Plus Dark Theme
AWD

While budget cuts to Medicaid continue to take center stage, I implore our elected leaders, particularly Sens. Shelley Moore Capito and Jim Justice, both R-W.Va., to keep in mind the faces behind the statistics. We must protect and preserve Medicaid to support our state's future.

Candice Lefeber is the executive director of West Virginia's American Academy of Pediatrics.

SPONSORED CONTENT

Hold on to That Summer Feeling with Endless Summer® Hydrangeas

BY ENDLESS SUMMER® HYDRANGEAS

This guide highlights how to get the most out of your hydrangeas and keep summer vibes strong all season. Learn more about your

privacy options