

Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Opposes Bush Administration Attack on People with Disabilities

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a Washington-based coalition of over 100 national disability organizations. The CCD is strongly opposed to President Bush's recently proposed Medicaid reforms because they would eliminate the longstanding guarantee that all Medicaid beneficiaries in a state have access to a comprehensive array of services. The services and supports that beneficiaries currently receive — including children and adults with disabilities — are based on what they need. For their health and well-being, these services are not optional. These supports and services enable children and adults with disabilities to live in their own homes and communities.

The President states that he is interested in modernizing and streamlining the Medicaid program. However, disability advocates know that what the Administration's plan really would do is deconstruct and eviscerate a program that has been the lifeblood of millions of children and adults with disabilities and their families.

Services and supports currently provided by Medicaid that enable individuals to lead full and meaningful lives would be eliminated when no other alternatives exist. Medicaid is generally the only choice for most people to receive comprehensive disability services.

Medicaid Works

For children with all types of disabilities, access to the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit, with its variety of screenings, services and therapies, can often make a major difference in their lives. Access to these important services is what enables them to lead healthy and more active lives; avoid additional disabilities; continue to live at home with their families; make it through school; play sports; get a job; and participate actively in the community in which they live.

Medicaid is the primary public source of funding for long-term services and supports for people with disabilities of all ages and it is the largest funder of state and local spending on mental health services in the country.

For people with epilepsy, mental illness, and a variety of other conditions, Medicaid is very often the only source of access to prescription drug coverage.

For people with a variety of physical disabilities, such as spinal cord or traumatic brain injuries or cerebral palsy, Medicaid usually is the only way they can get access to durable medical equipment like wheelchairs or prosthetic devices, as well as assistive technology.

For many people with cognitive and other types of disabilities, Medicaid generally is the only source of funds for them to live in the community where they belong instead of being inappropriately warehoused in nursing homes or institutions.

Wrong Solution for the Wrong Problem

The President has proposed reforms that give only one stakeholder in the Medicaid program — the states — virtually unchecked flexibility at the expense of beneficiaries and providers. Removing the entitlement to

Medicaid for children and adults with disabilities and their families will give states unlimited discretion to limit access to health and long-term services and supports that these individuals need. These are the people for whom “safety net” programs like Medicaid have life-altering implications.

The President’s proposal attacks well-reasoned and time-tested beneficiary protections as though they were responsible for current challenges in financing Medicaid. They are not. Federal oversight of state programs is often the only way to ensure fairness and non-discrimination. It is often the only way to protect the most vulnerable individuals from abuse, as well as demand accountability for this taxpayer-supported program.

Medicaid can be a solution to uninsurance. It is not the reason that so many children and adults in our nation are uninsured. Instead of recognizing that Medicaid plays a critical role in mitigating the problem of uninsurance, by providing health care coverage to children and families, the elderly, and people with disabilities — often the most vulnerable and poorest individuals in the country -- the President would sacrifice what makes Medicaid work in the name of providing meager health coverage to new populations.

The President’s proposal would hold the long-term health of Medicaid hostage to short-term state fiscal relief. This ignores the reality that short-term and long-term challenges require attention. Positive modernization proposals would include:

- Maintaining the existing entitlement to Medicaid’s full range of benefits and to the federal protections that make access to these necessary services and supports dependable and real.
- Temporarily increasing financing to states that helps to preserve the national investment in Medicaid. When the economy struggles, the federal government has a vital role in preventing a worsening crisis.
- Ensuring that states effectively implement the EPSDT program. EPSDT is a critical tool to prevent and minimize disability and to ensure that children get the best possible start in this world so they can grow up to be contributing members of society.
- Establishing mandatory coverage for home- and community-based services that provide a viable alternative to institutional living for people with disabilities and the elderly.
- Increasing the federal responsibility for the cost of providing services to Medicare beneficiaries. This includes increased federal support for prescription drug coverage and long-term care services for low-income persons eligible for both Medicaid and Medicare.

The President’s proposal fails people with disabilities and dishonors the nation’s commitment to its residents — it is not in the national interest. While the President has offered several proposals under the New Freedom Initiative that portray his understanding of some of the concerns of people with disabilities, his Medicaid modernization proposals expose a disconnect between rhetoric and reality.

Any changes to Medicaid must recognize the unique populations enrolled in Medicaid, including seven million people with severe disabilities – both children and adults. State Children’s Health Insurance Program and private market benefits packages are not only inadequate for these individuals, but they are also often completely unavailable. What the Medicaid program calls “optional” services are, in reality, mandatory disability services for the children and adults who need them. These services often are not only life-saving, but also the key to a positive quality of life – something everyone in our nation deserves.

We pledge to work with the Committee to ensure that any modifications to the program are in the best interests of children and adults served by Medicaid -- which in the long run would be in the best interests of our nation

Association of University Centers on Disabilities
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
The Arc of the United States
United Cerebral Palsy Associations