Medicaid is a powerful tool to fight COVID-19

There have been several important changes to Medicaid recently. These changes were designed to make it easier for people to get the health care they need during the COVID-19 emergency.

This document outlines those recent changes – and what else needs to be done so that we all have the coverage we need in this pandemic.

For other COVID-19 questions, or information in other languages, dial 2-1-1, or visit www.ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus

Changes to Medicaid in response to COVID-19

What the US Congress has changed

Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA): This law makes sure people covered by Medicaid do not lose their coverage during the public health emergency. Changes include:

- States are not allowed to make it harder for people to enroll in Medicaid;
- States cannot cut any benefits offered to people on Medicaid;
- COVID-19 testing is free for anyone covered by Medicaid and NC Health Choice, and to the uninsured;
- No increases are allowed in Medicaid premiums;
- States may not cut anyone from Medicaid through December 31. This includes pregnant women (even after they give birth), children aging out of the Medicaid program, and foster youth (even after they leave foster care)

What the state of North Carolina has changed

NC DHHS is working to increase access to telehealth services so that families can receive many services remotely. These services include well child visits, dental care, physical and occupational therapy, and behavioral health.

Families should ask their providers about both physical and behavioral health services they can receive outside the doctor's office.

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Speak up for NC families

Two critical steps are still needed

1. One in ten adults in North Carolina has no health coverage. Many of North Carolina's uninsured are working on the front lines of the pandemic, including childcare providers and food service workers. North Carolina's legislature should accept the federal funding to expand Medicaid now. Expanding Medicaid would unlock billions in federal funding to our struggling health care systems and cut the number of uninsured in our state in half. It would also allow people to get treatment if they were to become sick with COVID-19.

2. Today, NC Health Choice is separate from Medicaid. This extra red tape means that over 100,000 children may have trouble re-enrolling during the public health emergency. The NC legislature should merge these two programs to ensure kids have the same protections during COVID-19 as everyone else.

Visit https://www.ncleg.gov/RequestForComments/33 to urge the state legislature to act. Here are sample comments you can use, or write your own:

Sample Comments to the NC House Select Committee on COVID-19:
Too many people in North Carolina are facing a pandemic with no health coverage. I urge you to cover the uninsured in our state by expanding Medicaid. Your action would bring in billions to our struggling health care systems and protect low-income North Carolina families from financial disaster. I also would like to urge you to ensure that children have the same protections during COVID-19 as everyone else. Merging the NC Health Choice program with Medicaid would cut red tape and make it easier to keep kids enrolled and get them the care they need. Thank you.

Background: What is Medicaid?

Medicaid is a public health insurance program. Medicaid provides comprehensive health coverage for over 2 million North Carolinians, especially children. Medicaid gives children, older adults, people with disabilities, and low-income people access to the health care they need.

Medicaid has a history of helping people in times of crisis.

The Medicaid health insurance program is there for families when the unthinkable happens. Just like after 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the recent hurricanes in Puerto Rico, Medicaid can expand and grow to offer quality, affordable health coverage for those who lose jobs or become ill through no fault of their own.