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Florida Can Put Medicaid to Work Against the Coronavirus Now

"The great advantage we have is that the decisions we all make – as governments, businesses, communities, families & individuals – can influence the trajectory of this #COVID19 epidemic."

Tedro Adhanom Ghebreyesus, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General

By Alison Yager, Director of Policy Advocacy

COVID-19, the novel coronavirus which has reached pandemic proportions, presents a public health emergency. Some states have invested significant resources in their public health systems and medical safety net, preparing them to meet this challenge with robust operations. Meanwhile, [Florida ranks 39th](#) in the nation for public health funding per capita, and has failed to expand Medicaid, leaving us with the country's [fourth highest rate](#) of uninsured (13%). This systematic disassembling of the public health safety net is brought to light as COVID-19 threatens the health and lives of all Floridians, but leaves acutely vulnerable all those uninsured residents who may be unable to access testing or treatment, as well as those, who because of a harsh new [immigration test](#), may be afraid to do so.

Florida should immediately take the following steps to address the public health crisis we face¹:

- Florida should **Expand Medicaid** to cover all adults up to age 65 who earn up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- **Cover and pay for care and treatment** furnished in offsite settings that can supplement the capabilities of desperately overstretched hospitals.
- Ensure that if/when a **vaccine** becomes available, coverage is required for all eligible children under Medicaid's early and periodic screening, diagnosis, and treatment benefit, as well as for all Medicaid-enrolled adults.
- For Medicaid patients in **long-term care nursing facilities and other institutional settings**, or for those receiving home and community-based care, Florida should offer temporary payment increases to provide enhanced care, including additional nursing assistance to deal with intensive patient needs. These state expenditures would all qualify for federal financing.
- **Until the legislature approves Medicaid expansion, Florida should extend temporary Medicaid eligibility to fund expanded coronavirus screening and treatment for the state's poorest residents. The state should extend temporary eligibility to any uninsured state resident in connection with a specific diagnosis.**

¹Adapted from "[Medicaid and the Coronavirus](#): Putting the Nation's Largest Health Care First Responder to Work", Sara Rosenbaum for the Commonwealth Fund, March 9, 2020

A virus as infectious as this one will not be bound by neighborhood, or by coverage status. A server delivering food while sick with COVID-19, for instance, puts all restaurant patrons at risk; a supermarket cashier sick with COVID-19 puts all shoppers at risk. And these are precisely the sorts of employees most likely to lack health insurance. If Florida were to expand Medicaid, low-wage workers like these would be among the approximately 800,000 newly eligible for Medicaid, and in turn, access to critical health services.

Seen through the prism of current events, our failure to expand Medicaid is not just a moral outrage, it is an accomplice to the spread of a lethal pandemic. The time to take action to protect the health and save the lives of all Floridians is now.

“Public health is purchasable. Within natural limitations, a community can determine its own death rate.” – Hermann Biggs, New York State Health Commissioner, 1914-23

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Florida Health Justice Project recognizes that access to quality and affordable health care is a human right and engages in comprehensive advocacy to expand healthcare access and promote health equity for vulnerable Floridians through advocacy, storytelling, outreach, education and technical assistance and support. www.floridahealthjustice.org