



Media Release

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HHS Appropriations Votes to Eliminate Medicaid Coverage for Seriously Injured Children and Pregnant Women

Salt Lake City, UT—The Utah Legislature’s Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee voted today to eliminate Medicaid coverage for nearly 10,000 pregnant women and seriously injured and ill children.

As part of a package of \$23.5 million worth of cuts, the Committee recommended eliminating the Medicaid Medically Needy program for children and pregnant women. The Medically Needy program, which serves over 4,000 individuals every year, allows families with a seriously injured or ill child to qualify for Medicaid by spending down their income to qualify by paying the state or using their excess income to pay some of their healthcare bills.

In addition, the committee recommended reducing the asset limit for low-income pregnant women from \$5000 to \$3000. The Utah Department of Health estimates that 5,600 women will lose their health benefits if eligibility change is made. Utah is one of only 7 states that look at a woman’s assets when determining eligibility and a \$3,000 asset limit would be the most restrictive in the nation.

“Kicking the sickest and most in need off of Medicaid is no way to balance the state budget,” states Lincoln Nehring, an attorney with the Utah Health Policy Project. “These Utahns do not have the resources to pay for care on their own. Losing their coverage will force them to either forgo health care or seek care in the most expensive place imaginable, our emergency rooms. Our state leaders must be innovative and, if necessary, have the courage to raise additional revenues to avoid cuts that will cause serious and long-term harm to our citizens.”

“Utahns on the Medically Needy Program have serious injuries and illnesses. By taking away the Medicaid safety net for them, the state is basically putting these families at risk for bankruptcy,” says Jessica Kendrick of UHPP. “Making it harder for pregnant woman to qualify severely limits their ability to access vital pre-natal care, which could ultimately cost the state more in the long run.”

Utah’s Medicaid program serves over 210,000 Utahns. The vast majority of enrollees are children (120,000 enrollees), followed by people with disabilities, and very poor parents (parents earning less than 44% of poverty (\$6,400 per year for a family of two). With the exception of people with disabilities seniors, former foster care children between 18 and 21 and very poor women with breast and cervical cancer, adults without children are ineligible for Utah’s Medicaid program.