

Chilling Documentary Looks At The Deadly Consequences Of Denying Medicaid Coverage

Link: <http://thinkprogress.org/health/2014/06/06/3445922/utah-medicaid-expansion-documentary/>

Video Link: <http://youtu.be/o2kEubKv1LI>

By [Tara Culp-Ressler](#)

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Raymond Ward, who says his patient Emily died because she could not access Medicaid coverage

CREDIT: Entitled to Life

Emily was diagnosed with breast cancer just five months after she was laid off from her job as a

software developer, right in the middle of the economic downturn in 2009. After her tumor was removed, she couldn't afford to keep paying for insurance coverage, so she skipped out on chemotherapy and radiation. The cancer came back. Emily is now dead.



Emily's primary care doctor says her story may have ended differently if she had been able to access coverage under Obamacare's optional Medicaid expansion. But she lives in Utah, where lawmakers have [resisted implementing that policy](#), despite the fact that it's a central tenet of the health reform law.

That's just one of the stories featured in a new documentary, "[Entitled to Life](#)," that's attempting to put a personal face on the politically contentious issue of Medicaid expansion. Like more than [20 other states](#) across the country, Utah hasn't yet agreed to accept [generous federal funds](#) to extend public insurance to additional low-income residents who don't currently qualify for Medicaid. "Entitled to Life" makes the case that the [human cost](#) is too great to continue resisting this Obamacare provision.

Paul Gibbs, the independent filmmaker who made the new documentary, is personally invested in the issue because he's seen the benefits of Medicaid coverage firsthand. Five years ago, when he was struggling to put himself through film school — in addition to working part time and caring for his niece and nephew — he was diagnosed with end stage kidney failure.

“I was working hard on a lot of different things, but I didn’t have health insurance. I needed help surviving, and Medicaid was one of the things that made it possible for me to have that kidney transplant,” Gibbs recounted in an interview with ThinkProgress. “I really want other people to have the same opportunity I had — just to get the help they need to stay alive.”

Many of the other Utah residents featured in Gibbs’ documentary are dealing with recovering from car accidents, strokes, and surgeries, as well as managing chronic conditions like autoimmune disorders and epilepsy. They have painful stories of the consequences of not being able to access the health care they need. For instance, a Vietnam war veteran was forced to file for bankruptcy after his wife, who worked a minimum wage job and didn’t qualify for Medicaid coverage or his VA plan, needed two operations to clear her arteries and remove an aneurysm. An uninsured single mother sometimes tries to cut open her painful [abscesses](#) at home with a razor blade, because she can’t afford to visit a doctor and get the procedure done with anesthesia.

“I think there is a determination from those who oppose Medicaid expansion to view it just in terms of numbers, to think of this in terms of tax dollars. But this isn’t about tax dollars. This is about human lives,” Gibbs pointed out. “I think that, if most of these legislators really allow themselves to hear what these people have to say, they would be moved.”

“Entitled to Life” is [available on YouTube](#), and Gibbs is planning to partner with state-based organizations to screen segments of the film at upcoming town halls regarding Medicaid expansion. He’s hoping that it will open Utah residents’ eyes and encourage them to “make some noise” in support of a [potential expansion plan](#) proposed by Gov. Gary Herbert (R) earlier this year. That plan has the potential to extend coverage to an estimated 110,000 low-income Utahns.

Even though the new film is being used as a lobbying tool to persuade the Utah legislature, Gibbs also thinks that the stories in his documentary could have a broader impact outside the borders of his own state. Across the country, [millions of impoverished Americans](#) are [locked out](#) of health reform altogether because their lawmakers are [resisting Medicaid expansion](#). Gibbs thinks that’s partly because Medicaid has been unfairly construed as a government handout.

“What the film is really about, more than anything else, is that the stereotypes about people who need Medicaid and these other social programs are just not true,” he said. “These people aren’t lazy. They’re hardworking, and they’re really just like anybody else. They just need help. The fact that they’re poor doesn’t reflect anything on their character; it reflects only on their circumstances. I think that’s true no matter what state you’re in.”

“They’re just our fellow human beings,” Gibbs added, “and we need to stop stigmatizing them just so we can tell ourselves it’s okay to let them die.”