

Medicaid in Challenging Economic Times: Devastation or Salvation

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Medication or food? As layoffs become rampant, it is a personal debate that has become all too common during these harsh economic times. While businesses, nonprofits, and state agencies everywhere struggle to trim budgets, a dependable income and the stability of vital programs - such as Medicaid - are suddenly threatened.

At 10:00 am on March 19, a panel of experts will gather in the Goodwill Humanitarian Building at the University of Utah to discuss "Medicaid in Challenging Economic Times." The panel will provide information on changes to Medicaid; how these changes impact recipients; plans to address the challenges and changes to Medicaid coverage; and how professionals can become advocates through legislative, policy, and practice initiatives. This important and timely discussion is open to anyone interested in how the recession will affect friends, family, clients, or service recipients. "With systemic reforms launching at the national and state level, we have a tremendous opportunity to improve our decision-making around Medicaid," said Judi Hilman, executive director of the Utah Health Policy Project and one of the scheduled panel members. "Reforms will be designed to realign all treatment and financing decisions with evidence-based medicine. As time goes on, this will be our saving grace for the Medicaid population." The panel, moderated by Fraser Nelson of Promise Venture Partners, will also include Kent Alderman, an attorney with Parsons, Behle, and Latimer; Kathy Link, assistant director of eligibility at the Utah Department of Workforce Services; David Sundwall, executive director of the Utah Department of Health; and Tonya Hales, director of the Bureau of Long Term Care for the Utah Medicaid Program.

The panel presentation was organized and is sponsored by the W.D. Goodwill Initiatives on Aging Coalition housed at the University of Utah College of Social Work. "We felt this would be a valuable discussion, given the impact of the economic downturn on public services," said Fran Wilby, associate director of Neighbors Helping Neighbors, and one of the individuals involved in organizing the event. "A number of the individuals with whom we work fall into the category of 'low income,' so we can see firsthand the potential devastation of cuts to Medicaid."

Deep cuts continue to loom, even as the 2009 legislative session draws to a close. "Once the legislative session ends," said Wilby, "we will have a more thorough understanding of how the federal stimulus will impact Medicaid and human services in Utah."