



Utah Providers

SPEAK UP

“Funding for critical Medicaid services like physical & occupational therapy, speech & hearing therapy needs to be restored,” says Utah provider

Critical Medicaid Services Still Need To Be Restored

Melissa Guss-Hoffelmeyer is President of Brighton Rehabilitation. She sees first-hand the benefits of access to comprehensive rehabilitation care. *“After an injury, illness, or surgery, physical therapy helps increase flexibility and strength, improve mobility, and decrease pain. Individuals therefore avoid more costly procedures and improve their productivity,”* explains Melissa.



“Occupational therapy helps patients regain basic skills needed for dressing, bathing, and eating. With access to this care, patients can live or work independently after an injury or illness,” she continues. *“And, last but not least, speech therapy helps individuals recover basic communication functions and the ability to safely swallow without the risk of choking.”*

A stroke patient provides the perfect example of someone who needs all three of these critical Medicaid services. Physical therapy helps build back strength and coordination; occupational therapy helps them regain their balance so they can step into the shower, and speech therapy helps them re-learn how to communicate. The patient can make a full recovery—but only with access to this care. Without it, they will ultimately cost the state more dollars and drop out of the workforce.

“It is cost-effective, not cost-prohibitive, to fully fund the optional services for Medicaid. Despite its name, ‘optional’ services are not optional. They are integral to good health,” concludes Melissa.

A Policy Solution: Restore Critical Medicaid Services

During the 2008 Special Session, the Legislature cut five ‘optional’ services (eye glasses, outpatient physical and occupational therapy, and speech/ hearing therapy) for adults on Medicaid. While the immediate savings to the state general fund was modest (\$500,000), the cost for the patients who lost these services is very high. Example after example shows how health and productivity are increased when patients have access to critical care—improving the quality of life of beneficiaries and, in the long run, saving the state money by improving the long-term health and basic functionality of recipients.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the economic recovery package) provides sufficient resources to restore these critical services. For every dollar the state invests in Medicaid, including optional services, the Federal Government will now match \$4! As the Legislature finalizes budget priorities, it should:

- Restore the services using the enhanced Federal match. These restorations are worthwhile even on a temporary basis because of lasting benefits to beneficiaries’ health.
- Avoid offsetting the stimulus with reductions elsewhere in the Medicaid program.
- Consider the full economic impact of Medicaid. Investing in Medicaid will help to jump-start Utah’s economy, as this money would be spent immediately and support thousands of Utah jobs. Medicaid provides the best return for our investment of state dollars.