

Medicaid cuts would be devastating to care of Maine children

The effects on our communities would be felt immediately and well into the future.

House and Senate Republicans are attempting to use a process known as “budget reconciliation” to pass tax cuts and other priorities outlined by President Trump, and in so doing, Congress is considering significant cuts to Medicaid. As a general pediatrician with almost three decades of caring for kids in Maine, I have seen thousands of patients who rely on Medicaid (known as MaineCare in our state) as their primary health insurance, and I want to be very clear: Federal cuts to Medicaid would be devastating to the care that Maine children need and deserve.

The Medicaid program was designed to meet children’s unique developmental needs and is the

backbone of health care coverage for 53% of Maine children (close to 140,000 kids). Nationally, Medicaid provides health coverage to 44% of children and youth with special health care needs, and 99% of children in the foster care system. But make no mistake in understanding that cuts to Medicaid will affect ALL children, regardless of whether they are covered by Medicaid, because our child health system depends on Medicaid to keep pediatric practices and children’s hospitals open.

Since 2014, nearly one-third of Maine’s labor and delivery units (9 of 29) have closed or announced plans to close, and in 2024, Northern Maine Medical Center in Fort Kent closed its child and adolescent psychiatric unit, leaving only three facilities in the state to care for youth needing inpatient psychiatric care.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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While we know the decisions for these closures are multifactorial, under-investment in Medicaid is likely a significant reason why these hospitals have had to cut their services. With over half of all births in many of Maine’s rural counties covered by MaineCare, further cuts to the program will affect all patients, not just those on MaineCare who can no longer seek care at these rural hospitals.

I recently had the opportunity to meet directly with Sen. Collins, as well as with one of Sen. King’s policy advisors, as part of a group of 400 pediatricians who gathered in Washington to meet with

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lawmakers to discuss the importance of preserving Medicaid. I appreciate Sen. Collins’ bipartisan approach and her position of influence as chair of the United States Senate Committee on Appropriations.

I was able to share that Medicaid promotes children’s health and well-being in many ways, including access to dental, vision and hearing services, and access to comprehensive/wrap-around care for children and youth with special health care needs that private insurance often does not cover. We reviewed how Medicaid provides coverage for essential mental and behavioral health services

for our children, including those for conditions like ADHD, autism spectrum disorders and substance use disorder services.

Beyond these direct services, Medicaid helps to ensure that Maine children grow to become healthy and productive adults. Children with Medicaid are more likely to be healthier than their uninsured peers; more likely to graduate high school and college; and more likely to be employed, earn higher wages and pay more in taxes.

Medicaid supports the entire child-health ecosystem. It is integral to the viability of pediatric practices across the state, from

primary and subspecialty care practices to inpatient hospitals. In fact, Medicaid coverage has been critical in driving down the rate of uninsured children in Maine, which stands at 5.2% as of 2023.

As a pediatrician, it is clear to me that Medicaid supports the whole family. I understand the connection between the health and well-being of parents and caregivers and that of children. Medicaid (MaineCare) has supported generations of families in Maine. Any cuts to this program will have longstanding effects on our communities not only today but well into the future.

I urge you to please contact our U.S. senators and strongly encourage them to oppose any federal proposal that cuts Medicaid funding to our state, or limits access to benefits or services for Maine children and families.