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Health Advocates Urge Governor Little to Exempt Medicaid from Budget Cuts

New research underscores the importance of Medicaid during health and economic crises

Boise, ID— Close the Gap Idaho is strongly urging Governor Little and state officials to exempt Medicaid from any state general fund budget cuts. As other state agencies have been asked to make cuts of 5% or more, health advocates are stressing the devastating human and economic impacts that similar cuts would have for Medicaid.

Cutting the Medicaid budget could be especially devastating to Idahoans with disabilities; Christine Pisani, Executive Director of the Idaho Council on Development Disabilities explained why exempting Medicaid from budget cuts is critical: “Protecting our Home and Community Based Services funded through Medicaid dollars is not only the right thing to do, it is also fiscally responsible” said Pisani. “By preserving Medicaid dollars to adequately fund our HCBS services, necessary supports will be provided in people’s homes and in their home communities, keeping people with disabilities out of higher cost institutions, which would be an increased cost to the taxpayers.”

Cuts would force state officials to choose between laying off hardworking administrators that keep Idaho’s Medicaid program running, or cutting services to the Idahoans who rely on Medicaid to keep them healthy. Joyce Witzel, a Kuna resident who lost her job due to COVID-19 is one of the several hundred thousand Idahoans whose health could be put at risk by budget cuts.

"I've worked for years with untreated arthritis that has gotten progressively more painful" said Joyce, "because of Medicaid expansion, I've been able to go to the doctor and get the treatment I need to be productive." As Idahoans like Joyce try to get back on their feet Medicaid can provide the comprehensive coverage they need to keep their families, our communities and work force healthy, "I'm anxious to start working again and I'm grateful that accessing the health care is one less thing I have to worry about right now."

Thousands of Idahoans like Joyce, Idahoans with disabilities, Idahoans wondering how they are going to pay their rent in June *need* to know that they will have health coverage during this recession. The Governor stated on the 26th that he wasn't aware of any plans for cuts, but these Idahoans need a guarantee that they won't lose coverage, that crucial services won't be cut from their coverage, and that medical bills won't be one more thing to add to

the list of anxieties during this recession. Exempting Medicaid from budget cuts is fiscally responsible, and necessary to ensure the health and safety of our state.

At a time where more Idahoans could rely on Medicaid to make ends meet than ever, cutting the Medicaid budget would stretch precious state dollars very thin. [A new report from the Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy](#) found that a 15 percent unemployment rate in the state could lead to 55,000 Idahoans joining Medicaid as they lose employer-based coverage.

“Every state dollar of Medicaid leverages federal dollars that add capacity to our state’s ability to meet health needs during the pandemic” said Alejandra Cerna Rios, Director of the Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy. “By choosing to preserve state Medicaid investments, leaders can also avoid costs related to uninsured Idahoans seeking care.”

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About Close the Gap Idaho: Close the Gap Idaho is a network of over 5,000 organizations and individuals statewide, working to support a complete solution to the coverage gap and to preserve health coverage for Idahoans. Close the Gap Idaho has led the effort to expand Medicaid in Idaho since 2014. A list of Close the Gap Idaho steering committee members can be found on the Close the Gap Idaho website.