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Health Care Advocates Respond to Governor Little's State of the State

Medicaid expansion positively impacting families, communities and the economy during the pandemic

BOISE, ID—Following Governor Little's State of the State address today, **January 11, 2021**, Close the Gap Idaho provided a response to his budget recommendations as the Idaho Legislature convenes the 2021 Legislative Session. The response highlights the value of Medicaid to our state and Idahoans, the critical role it is playing during the ongoing public health and economic crisis and recommendations to fully fund the Medicaid budget.

Nichole Stull, an Idahoan whose family has benefited from Medicaid expansion, reflected on her experience this past year stating, "Not having health insurance is always a concern, but not having it during a year of a pandemic is especially concerning. Because we have Medicaid expansion and because it kicked in January of 2020, that is a huge peace of mind for my family. Should we get COVID-19 or any of the other myriad of things that could happen, it was life-saving for our sanity and our peace of mind."

- ▶ [VIDEO: Nichole Explains Peace of Mind and Medicaid Expansion](#) (52 seconds)

Expanding Medicaid has allowed about 100,000 Idahoans to get the care they need, with some families, like Nichole's, accessing health care services for the first time in years. "My husband was able to get his first physical in about five years. During that physical, they found that he had high blood pressure, which had been left untreated." Medicaid has been making a difference, as Idahoans who do not have access to employer health insurance, or cannot afford a private plan, finally have an option. "Without Medicaid expansion, this wouldn't be possible," said Nichole.

- ▶ [VIDEO: Nichole Discusses Medicaid's Impact on Her Husband's Health](#) (67 seconds)

Dr. Boyd Southwick, a primary care doctor in Idaho Falls, weighed in on how patients and providers have benefited from Medicaid expansion stating, "I recall a patient recently who came in for a wellness physical, completely asymptomatic, and during the physical we were able to determine that he had cancer. We were able to get him into cancer treatment, and today he's in remission."

- ▶ [VIDEO: Dr. Southwick Talks About Diagnosing a Patient's Cancer](#) (35 seconds)

Having access to preventative care also provides an economic benefit to Idaho. Dr. Southwick continued, "If patients don't have access to care and they're not getting their preventative visits, then they tend to live with more sickness and more symptoms. When that compounds, then they end up going to the emergency room, and those visits are much more costly to the health care system."

- ▶ [VIDEO: Dr. Southwick Discusses Impact on Emergency Room Visits](#) (28 seconds)

As a physician, Dr. Southwick sees the benefits of Medicaid and Medicaid expansion firsthand. He explained, “We are so excited that Medicaid expansion is happening here in Idaho. Before that, I had many patients that had issues with diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, and depression that weren’t well-treated because they didn’t have access to care. Now that they do, we can treat them with a higher quality of health care and help them live healthier, happier lives.”

- ▶ [VIDEO: Dr. Southwick and Medicaid Expansion Excitement](#) (36 seconds)
- ▶ [VIDEO: Dr. Southwick Talks About Access to Care](#) (37 seconds)

Close the Gap Idaho released a budget brief that explains the State Fiscal Year 2022 (SFY2022) Medicaid budget projections in detail. The brief shows that the SFY2022 Medicaid budget will gain at least \$54 million in savings from federal funding intended to provide relief to Medicaid programs during the pandemic. Add this to the roughly \$50 million in unspent surplus dollars intended for Medicaid at the end of SFY2021, and the Medicaid budget will have more than enough to cover all Medicaid expansion state costs. The budget is so strong heading into SFY2022 that it is projected to have a cushion to get through the pandemic and uncertain economic and health system environments.

- 📄 [REPORT: Medicaid Budget Brief: Understanding SFY2022 Projections for Traditional Medicaid and Medicaid Expansion](#), Released 1/11/21

There is simply no financial reason to cut Medicaid. However, Governor Little’s Medicaid budget recommendation includes proposed cuts to Medicaid of \$118 million (\$30 million in state funds and \$88 million in federal funds). About 90 percent of the proposed cuts to state funds would impact traditional Medicaid, which provides services primarily to children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities.

“Simply put, there is no hole in the Medicaid budget to fill. Thanks to federal Medicaid relief, Idaho can fully fund Medicaid during the pandemic and economic recovery,” explained Christine Tiddens, director of Idaho Voices for Children. “Why wouldn’t we use the funding intended to relieve the Medicaid budget for the Medicaid budget?”

Medicaid plays an integral role in Idaho’s health care system with investments going directly to providers and substantial economic benefits to the state and taxpayers. With 95 percent of Idaho designated as having a primary care shortage and 100 percent having a mental health provider shortage, COVID-19 has pushed our state’s already lean health care system to the brink. Lawmakers must prioritize keeping Medicaid whole and our health care system strong over the coming year.

- 📄 [REPORT: Medicaid in Idaho: Saves Lives & Helps Idaho’s Economy](#), Released 1/11/21

“Thanks to Medicaid expansion coverage beginning January 2020, Idaho was better positioned to respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency and prevent the resulting economic downturn from worsening access to care, financial security and health disparities,” said Christine. “Fully funding the Medicaid budget during these uncertain times will allow the state’s economic and health system environments to stabilize, and it will provide Idaho with additional data to better assess and understand Medicaid expansion utilization patterns, enrollment trends and costs.”

Close the Gap Idaho recommends a comprehensive review of Medicaid, including Medicaid expansion, once there is sufficient, comprehensive data. Taking time to thoroughly review Medicaid expansion will ensure more accurate cost projections as well as an understanding of the impacts of proposed program changes on the health system. Idaho Code §56-253 already directs the state to conduct such a review by January 2023.

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❖ **Press release video clips:** All video clips included in this release are available for media use in reporting and broadcast. The full series of seven videos featuring Dr. Boyd Southwick and Nichole Stull can be viewed online here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtNwEFWz6Hg1XftP6sshRUoCjofgX1ixH>. Press release video clips include comments from Dr. Boyd Southwick and Nichole Stull:

- **Dr. Boyd Southwick** received his Bachelors of Science from BYU in 1994, graduating Magna Cum Laude. He received his medical degree from Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine in 2000. After completing a Family Medicine Residency in Springfield, Missouri, where he served as Chief Resident, he returned to Idaho Falls to practice medicine. Dr. Southwick is very active in the medical community. He is a past President of the Idaho Falls Medical Society and delegate to the Idaho Medical Association. He is on the Board of Directors of the Idaho Academy of Family Physicians. At the Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center, he has served as Chief of Staff and as Chairman of the Department of Family Medicine. Currently, Dr. Southwick is the Medical Director of Hands of Hope Home Health and Hospice and Teton Post Acute Care & Rehabilitation.
- **Nichole Stull** lives in Boise with her husband Jared and five children. Jared was laid off from his job of five years and lost his employer-sponsored health insurance with it. Since then, they've struggled with access to affordable health coverage while supporting their family as independent contractors educating children, youth and adults. Now that they've been able to access Medicaid expansion, Jared has been able to get treatment for his sleep apnea and high blood pressure, and Nichole has been able to get the tests she needs to ensure she isn't developing a genetic cancer that has affected her mother and sister.

❖ **Press release attachments:**

- Close the Gap Idaho, Medicaid Budget Brief: Understanding SFY2022 Projections for Traditional Medicaid and Medicaid Expansion, released 1/11/21, at https://www.closesthegapidaho.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Medicaid-Budget-Brief-SFY22_1.11.21.pdf
- Close the Gap Idaho, Medicaid in Idaho: Saves Lives & Helps Idaho's Economy, released 1/11/21, at https://www.closesthegapidaho.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Medicaid-in-Idaho-Saves-Lives-and-Helps-Idahos-Economy_1.11.21.pdf

❖ **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](#).