



**February 4, 2021**

Contact: Cristian Corza

Office: (208) 703-8137 (cell)

Email: [ccorza@jannus.org](mailto:ccorza@jannus.org)

## **Federal Medical Relief Available for Medicaid through 2021**

*Health Care Advocates call on Idaho Legislators to fully fund Medicaid as federal support more than covers the cost of Medicaid during the pandemic.*

**BOISE, ID**—This morning, the Idaho Legislature received a budget presentation on Governor Little’s recommended Medicaid budgets for State Fiscal Year 2022 (SFY2022). Originally included in the governor’s budgets were 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 would come from programs that serve Idaho’s children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. With the Public Health Emergency extending through the rest of 2021, federal Medicaid relief will allow for full funding of the state Medicaid budget without having to implement program changes or cut access to life saving services during these unprecedented and uncertain times without having to implement the proposed cuts.

In a [letter to Governors](#), Health and Human Services Acting Secretary Norris Cochran announced the Biden Administration’s commitment to continuing higher Medicaid Funding for states through 2021 in recognition of the ongoing public health response needed to combat COVID-19. This announcement continues a policy put into place by the Trump Administration during the initial stages of the federal government’s COVID-19 response. The measure means that Idaho will continue to receive approximately \$10 million more per month in federal funds to help pay for the increased costs of health care during the global pandemic. “With the extension and additional advance notice, we seek to provide you with increased budgetary stability and predictability during this challenging time,” Cochran stated.

“The Trump and Biden administrations both recognized the need to stabilize state budgets and Medicaid programs during the public health crisis with federal relief. Simply put there is no hole in the Medicaid budget to fill,” explained Hillarie Hagen, Health Policy Associate at Idaho Voices for Children. “We are happy to see the recommendation to remove proposed Medicaid cuts during the Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee this morning. We call on the Idaho Legislature to move forward with a budget that fully funds Medicaid, including services that go to children, seniors and people with disabilities, and protects the health and safety of all Idahoans at a time when access to health care is most critical.”

Close the Gap Idaho released a budget brief that explains the SFY2022 Medicaid budget projections in detail. The brief shows that the SFY2022 Medicaid budget will gain at least \$60 million in savings from federal funding

intended to provide relief to Medicaid programs during the pandemic. Add this to the roughly \$63 million in unspent surplus dollars intended for Medicaid at the end of SFY2021, and the Medicaid budget will have more than enough to cover Medicaid expansion state costs. It is up to the Idaho Legislature to decide how these savings from federal Medicaid relief will be spent.

 [REPORT: Medicaid Budget Brief: Understanding SFY2022 Projections](#), Updated 2/3/21

“Thanks to Medicaid expansion coverage beginning January 2020, Idaho was better positioned to respond to the COVID-19 public health crisis and prevent the resulting economic downturn from worsening access to care, financial security and health disparities,” said Hillarie Hagen. “With this clear signal from Health & Human Services, Idaho can fully fund Medicaid during the pandemic and economic recovery.”

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.

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

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 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. Lawmakers must prioritize keeping Medicaid whole and our health care system strong over the coming year.

###

❖ **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, updated 2/2/21, at [https://www.closesthegapidaho.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Medicaid-Budget-Brief-SFY22\\_2.2.21.pdf](https://www.closesthegapidaho.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Medicaid-Budget-Brief-SFY22_2.2.21.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](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](#).