
A Lifeline for Communities

COVID RELIEF AND RESILIENCE FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNAL HEALTH SYSTEM

Temporarily Increase Coverage and Funding for Medicaid, the Nation's Health Safety Net

Medicaid is an essential lifeline for the most vulnerable in our communities, a key mitigator of health disparities in underserved and low-income communities, and a major source of funding for vital health and human services provided by our nonprofit partner agencies. Historically, Medicaid has served as the federal government's emergency lever to address serious economic downturns and disasters. Responding to the increase in unemployed Americans during the pandemic, Medicaid is straining to cover even more than the over 70 million low-income people, including children, families, older adults, and people with disabilities, who have historically relied on this program. Part of Medicaid's costs fall on states, straining their resources in some cases to such an extent that substantial cuts to Medicaid funded services such as emergency hospital care, inpatient psychiatric care, and home- and community-based care, are at risk without more federal aid.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act temporarily increased the federal government's contribution to state Medicaid programs, known as the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP), by 6.2 percentage points, the same increase deployed in the Great Recession of 2008-2010. Increasing the FMAP rate is a proven way to deliver rapid economic relief to states while ensuring the provision of life-saving health care to the most vulnerable, but this increase is insufficient given the severity of the current economic and health crisis.

Ensuring that FMAP is increased to at least 14 percent to serve the additional millions of Americans who will turn to the program for coverage and urgently needed care remains a top communal priority.

Make Telehealth Services Covered by Medicare Widely Available on a Permanent Basis

To address safety concerns during the public health emergency, the federal government greatly expanded coverage for telehealth to Medicare, Medicaid, and CHIP beneficiaries. Telehealth utilization has soared throughout the nation this year, including among our Jewish partner agencies, as they continue providing mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and home- and community-based services, among others, while keeping their clients, particularly vulnerable older adults and people with disabilities, and staff safe from the risk of infection. Communal agencies are eager for this expanded telehealth program to continue beyond the pandemic and allow providers to utilize audio-only devices -- as they have realized the many benefits and efficacy of telehealth.

Eliminating Medicare policies that impose barriers to widespread use of telehealth, including through audio-only devices, to patients wherever they reside remains a top communal priority.