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/ With threatened cuts in Medicaid services for disabled, 'some folks will quite literally just die'

Thu., Oct. 26, 2017, 12:18 p.m.

# With threatened cuts in Medicaid services for disabled, 'some folks will quite literally just die'





Debra Parsons, chair of the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities, holds a photo of her three adopted children, all of whom have autism; all received Medicaid services as they were growing up, and are now productive adults. Parsons joined other advocates on Thursday, Oct. 26, 2017 in Boise to urge Congress not to cut Idaho's existing Medicaid program, and to instead take steps to improve health care in the state. (Betsy Z. Russell)

Idahoans with disabilities and their advocates warned today that a GOP budget plan adopted by Congress this morning could force millions in cuts to Idaho's existing Medicaid program, with dire implications for disabled Idahoans who lose services.

“Medicaid has existed since 1968,” said Debra Parsons, chair of the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities and the mother of three children with autism. “It is vital to many families, especially in a rural state like Idaho, where we don't have access to big-city stuff.”

Parsons said when she and her husband adopted the three youngsters, their medical insurance wouldn't cover the kids, for reasons ranging from the fact that they were adopted to their pre-existing conditions. “Medicaid was the only recourse,” she said. Today, she said, “They are productive adults because of all the

services they were able to receive through Medicaid.”

Without Idaho’s current Medicaid services, Parsons warned, “some folks will quite literally just die.”

Ian Bott, who was diagnosed with autism at the age of 7, said services he received through Medicaid have helped him progress from Stage 3 autism to Stage 1. “I have a job I’ve been working at for 10-1/2 years,” he said, “initially with a job coach, but the last nine years I’ve done it on my own.” He still receives services about 15 hours a week. “Because of all this, I’ve been able to live pretty independent,” Bott said, and he’s about to graduate from college. “Medicaid has pretty much made me the best, fully functioning adult I can be.”

Close the Gap Idaho, a broad coalition of health care providers and advocates, joined the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities today to release a book of stories of Idahoans and their experiences with Medicaid, from children to people with disabilities to working adults who fall into the state’s coverage gap, making too much to qualify for the state’s limited Medicaid program, but not enough to qualify for subsidized health insurance through the state’s Your Health Idaho insurance exchange; you can [read it here](#).

Lauren Necochea, director of Idaho Voices for Children, said, “We are here today because we all want to live in an Idaho where your family’s economic circumstances don’t determine whether you can get necessary care. We are here today because we want to live in a state where you can get necessary care without bankrupting your family.”

Necochea called for Congress to back away from moves to cut Medicaid; stabilization of the health insurance market through passage of the bipartisan Alexander-Murray bill now pending in the Senate and reauthorization of the expired Childrens Health Insurance Program; and state action to address the coverage gap, which affects about 78,000 Idahoans.

Necochea said “one potential avenue” is the Idaho Health Care Plan, a concept now being developed by the Idaho Department of Health & Welfare, Idaho Department of Insurance and Your Health Idaho, which would cover about 35,000 of the sickest Idahoans who now fall into the gap. The plan also is aimed at lowering premiums on the state’s insurance exchange by moving a small group of

very ill Idahoans, including cancer patients, out of the private market and onto Medicaid; it would require applying for two separate waivers from the federal government to enact.

Jim Baugh, executive director of DisAbility Rights Idaho, said, “This is not a full solution, and it will not ... cover as many people as Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act. But it is an important step in the right direction.”

Baugh said many of the people who would be helped under the waiver plan are people with disabilities.

Necochea said Close the Gap Idaho needs more information before it can decide whether to endorse the waiver plan, but said, “We want to encourage the Legislature in this process of finding a solution.”

The group also released a “chart book” today on the waiver proposal and how it could work; you can [see it here](#).

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POSTED OCT. 26, 2017, 12:18 P.M.

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