



Changes to Medicaid and the Impact to Children with Disabilities and Special Needs February 2017

Medicaid is a vital program for children and youth with disabilities and special health care needs – children who have a broad range of chronic illnesses and/or disabilities like *cerebral palsy, epilepsy, diabetes or autism*. In Wisconsin, Medicaid provides health coverage to 519,923 children and 197,989 adults with disabilities, including children living in or near poverty (1 in every 4 children), abused and neglected children placed in state foster care systems, and children living with developmental and other disabilities.

Medicaid provides health care coverage including benefits specific to children such as HealthCheck (EPSDT), secondary insurance for families whose commercial plan does not cover specialized services for children with disabilities or special health care need (Katie Beckett Program), mental health services and critically important long-term supports and services including the Children’s Long-Term Support (CLTS) waivers, and Family Care/IRIS. These programs help pay for needed equipment, medications, therapy, homecare and other important supports and service.

How Might Changes Impact Children with Special Needs and their Families?

Changes to Medicaid, like block grants or per-capita caps, could drastically reduce our state’s ability to serve and protect children with disabilities or special health care needs and others who depend on these programs for their health and wellbeing.

If Medicaid is subject to per-capita caps or block grants, Wisconsin could have less money from the federal government, forcing the state to significantly reduce Medicaid coverage and/or services or increase state spending to make up the difference. Block grants or funding caps would allow states to:

- Create significantly longer waiting lists
- Lead to services cuts
- Make coverage less affordable
- Put state budgets at risk
- Require cost-savings measures
- Narrow provider networks to exclude pediatric specialists
- Add hurdles for children to access services, such as prior authorization
- Place barriers on expensive specialty care for children with complex health need
- Higher family premiums and deductibles
- Eliminate programs such as Katie Beckett

Why is Medicaid Critical for Families Who Have Children with Special Needs/Disabilities?

- Medicaid helps families afford the services and medicines their children need, often saving them from bankruptcy or extraordinary medical debt.
- Medicaid allows children with special needs to get the medical treatment, medications, equipment, therapies, and other services and supplies they need to stay as healthy as possible and avoid costly hospitalizations or ER visits.
- Medicaid allows parents to work and pay taxes by providing home health care for seriously ill children who need it.
- Medicaid covers early screening, diagnosis and treatment of developmental and health problems early in a child’s life, helping to avoid more expensive treatment or special education later on.