Wisconsin BPDD
Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities

U.S. House health reform bill puts people with disabilities at risk

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Today, the U.S. House passed a health reform bill (AHCA) that cuts Medicaid funding by 25% ($900 billion), and jeopardizes the critical Medicaid supports that makes it possible for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities to live and work in the community instead of being forced into expensive nursing homes or institutions.

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities rely on all of Wisconsin's 20 state Medicaid programs—including Family Care, IRIS, MAPP, BadgerCare—and the ForwardHealth card to stay healthy, become employed, and remain in their homes. Medicaid also provides essential therapies, equipment, special education services and equipment from physical therapists to feeding tubes, and many other services critical to people with disabilities and often makes the difference between caregivers being able to keep their jobs or leaving the workforce—jeopardizing their own financial futures—to care for family members.

The House bill caps and cuts federal funding for the entire Medicaid program without placing any controls on rising health care, prescription, and other increasing costs.

The bill imposes per capita caps and block grants to Medicaid, which will force states to make decisions on who should be covered under state Medicaid programs, whether people have to wait for services, and what community based services and supports are included.

"The AHCA will force states to make large and continued cuts to Medicaid each budget cycle, especially to home- and community-based programs, like Family Care and IRIS," says Beth Swedeen, Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities Executive Director. "Programs like Family Care have kept people needing long-term care in their homes rather than ending up in much more expensive Medicaid-funded institutions. Wisconsin has dramatically reduced Medicaid costs by keeping people in the community, progress that this bill threatens to reverse."

The bill allows states to choose not to cover Essential Health Benefits, effectively ending pre-existing conditions protections. The inclusion of high risk pools will provide little protection for people with pre-existing conditions. Experts on both sides of the aisle have clearly warned that "high risk pools" lead to higher costs, fewer benefits and waiting lists rationing care for those with pre-existing conditions.

It also lets states allow insurers to charge people higher premiums for health coverage based on their health which means insurers could once again discriminate based against people based on their medical history.

BPDD calls on the U.S. Senate to oppose the harmful cuts to Medicaid and rollback of protections for people with pre-existing conditions in the American Health Care Act.