Amidst social distancing and isolation orders, Idaho leaders are rapidly finding new ways to stop the spread of COVID-19 and prepare as the public health crisis escalates. Though the state has taken serious action that will certainly save lives, Idaho leaders can do more to enact policies to improve equity and access to health care. See below to learn more about what Idaho has already done and recommended next steps the state should take in response to the coronavirus.

**Idaho’s Health Policy Pathways for COVID-19 Response**

**Idaho has Made Positive, Proactive Medicaid Changes in Response to COVID-19**

- Governor Brad Little suspended co-pays, premiums, and non-voluntary disenrollment in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), making it easier for Idahoans to access and keep health coverage during the pandemic.
- To further protect Medicaid, the Governor should exempt it from any mandatory budget cuts given the importance of the program during a public health crisis. Cutting Medicaid now would be catastrophic.
- Medicaid’s budget is already strained in responding to COVID-19, recognizing this Congress granted an additional $130 million to Idaho to increase our Medicaid budget; budget moves like making cuts during the worst crisis our country has seen in one hundred years will cut health care capacity during a time Idaho needs it most.
- As economic impacts from the virus take their toll, Medicaid will make the difference for thousands of Idahoans who suddenly find themselves on hard times. As they recover and begin to make ends meet, Medicaid will provide them with the solid ground they need to be healthy and thrive.

**Idaho Agencies Can Take Additional Actions Today to Bolster our Health Care System**

- Idaho should create an emergency open enrollment period on the Idaho health insurance exchange, Your Health Idaho, for the duration of the public health crisis and resulting economic downturn. This would allow for the widest possible umbrella of coverage, with both Medicaid and private insurance providing opportunities for newly uninsured Idahoans to get covered.
- Idaho can apply for new Disaster Relief State Plan Amendments (SPA, template available here) that would make comprehensive and responsive changes to the COVID-19 pandemic. The SPA could allow for newly uninsured individuals to be covered by Medicaid at a 100% federal match for COVID-19 testing during the emergency, create new optional benefits, expand the use of telehealth, increase administrative capacity, and authorize new providers to deliver services. This would give the state comprehensive and flexible methods to slow the spread of the virus.
- Idaho can apply for Section 1115A and 1915C, appendix K, waivers to enhance health care delivery and improve home and community based services (HCBS) during the outbreak. These waivers would extend the HCBS program and allow for modifications such as applicable services via video, alternative methods of services when needed, and meal delivery for impacted populations who are isolated.
- States have a certain degree of flexibility when setting income eligibility thresholds for pregnancy-related Medicaid. At present, the average income limit across states for women to access this benefit in Medicaid is 200% of poverty, with a high of 380% in Iowa and a low of 138% in Idaho. Idaho should consider options to guarantee access to coverage for pregnant women during the COVID-19 pandemic, including increasing pregnancy-related Medicaid income limits.

If implemented, the above COVID-19 health policy options would reduce the burden on public employees who are working around the clock to respond to the crisis, and Idaho’s health care system would become more flexible and responsive to the outbreak. Acting early on these options will save lives and provide crucial care for thousands of Idahoans.