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Local Advocates Issue COVID-19 Health Policy Response Recommendations
Idaho Voices for Children urges state leaders to protect Idaho’s Medicaid budget, open enrollment on the health insurance exchange, and cover the costs of COVID-19 tests

Boise, ID— Idaho Voices for Children is issuing several health policy recommendations to help alleviate the health and fiscal impacts of COVID-19 and the resulting economic crisis. The local advocacy group urges state officials to (1) exempt Medicaid from any state general fund budget cuts, (2) immediately open enrollment on the health insurance exchange and (3) pursue federal approval for Medicaid to cover the costs of COVID-19 testing in Idaho.

First, Idaho Voices for Children strongly urges Governor Brad Little and state officials to exempt Medicaid from any state general fund budget cuts. As Idaho faces revenue shortfalls and budget cuts during the COVID-19 pandemic recession, it would be absolutely catastrophic to enact cuts to the state’s health care budget at this time. Medicaid is the most important public program that exists in times of emergency, none more so than a public health emergency.

“As economic impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic take their toll, Medicaid will make the difference for thousands of Idahoans who suddenly find themselves on hard times. Medicaid is not only vital for preventing the spread of the coronavirus, but it will be crucial to making sure Idahoans are able to financially recover after the crisis,” said Christine Tiddens, Director of Idaho Voices for Children. “Cutting Medicaid during this pandemic would only worsen the health and fiscal impacts on our state now and far into the future. With federal relief on its way and state rainy day funds available, Idaho can avoid budget cuts to Medicaid during this public health emergency. If now isn’t a rainy day, I don’t know what is.”

Second, as many Idahoans lose their jobs and access to affordable health insurance, state officials must ensure these individuals have the opportunity to purchase private insurance on the exchange, Your Health Idaho. Your Health Idaho should create an emergency, sixty day open enrollment period to give people the opportunity to purchase comprehensive coverage that meets their health care needs during this public health crisis.
“Opening the exchange right now will ensure more Idahoans can purchase comprehensive health insurance and get access to the healthcare they need during this unprecedented health crisis,” said Thea Zajac, Idaho Director of Advocacy for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. “The importance of both public and private health insurance options has never been clearer.”

A letter from health advocacy advocates asking the Your Health Idaho board of directors to hold an open enrollment period was delivered today, highlighting that public health experts are in agreement that Idaho needs to make coverage inclusive during the epidemic.

Finally, Idaho can utilize new federal emergency programs to further increase state flexibility and coverage options for Idahoans through new Disaster Relief State Plan Amendments for Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

“Filing Disaster Relief State plan Amendments would allow our health system greater flexibility to respond to the crisis by creating temporary Medicaid and CHIP program changes for the duration of the public health emergency,” said Logan Dennis, Health Care Policy Research and Communications Associate at Idaho Voices for Children. “This could allow Idaho to cover COVID-19 testing costs for Idahoans who are newly uninsured at a 100 percent federal match rate, meaning no state dollars spent. Covering COVID-19 tests will help both providers and Idahoans alike at no cost to taxpayers.”

“Our communities look to government to provide protection and services in times of crisis. At Idaho Voices for Children, we will do everything we can to support Idaho leaders as they evaluate options to battle this coronavirus pandemic and build policies that support everyone in our state, especially those most in need, concluded Christine Tiddens. “Idaho has multiple policy pathways available to help slow the spread of the virus, and acting now is crucial.”

Health care professionals, providers, public servants, the Governor’s COVID-19 working group, and hundreds of others are working tirelessly around the clock to ensure that Idaho is healthy and safe. We are incredibly thankful for the work they are doing to respond to COVID-19 and hope that these policy recommendations help guide further action to bolster Idaho’s health care system.

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**About Idaho Voices for Children** Idaho Voices for Children works to develop and promote a statewide public policy agenda that advocates for children on issues of health, education, safety, well-being and family economic security. Idaho Voices for Children is a program of Jannus, Inc., a non-partisan, non-profit. Learn more at idahovoices.org.