

Medicaid ensures almost 5 million babies and young children receive a healthy start in life

44% of babies and young children in America receive their health care through Medicaid.

Without Medicaid, millions of children won't get their basic medical needs met to ensure they are healthy enough to thrive at home, in early care and learning programs and as they enter elementary school.

- Medicaid provides access to prenatal care, screenings, sick and wellness visits, dental care and vaccines for millions of children
- Babies who have access to Medicaid have better health outcomes as adults, including fewer chronic health conditions

Medicaid is Essential

The United States is home to more than 11 million babies, representing 3.3 percent of the nation's population. Medicaid provides these babies access to high-quality health care, including preventative wellness visits and vaccinations that improve long-term health, educational, and economic outcomes. Medicaid's powerful Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit supports early identification of health and developmental concerns, enabling states to support the unique needs of babies.

- Medicaid currently finances over 42% of all US births
- Medicaid is the largest source of health insurance for children living in poverty, serving 81% of children under the age of six
- Children under 5 years old had the highest poverty rate in the country at 20.9 %, as of 2024 and Medicaid provides health insurance to the majority of these children

Medicaid is a vital federal/state partnership, with both partners contributing resources and states having flexibility in how they design their programs. Without continued federal support, health care costs for eligible families will shift to states, which will be forced to reduce services or increase costs for families.

Medicaid: What's at Stake



Medicaid plays a key role in supporting the health, development and well-being of Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN), Child Welfare-involved families, and children living in rural areas:

Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN)

- Medicaid covers almost half of all children with special health care needs (children defined as 0-21).
- Medicaid is the only source of coverage for nearly four in 10 children with special health care needs.
- One in five (20%) Medicaid-only children with special health care needs are age 5 or younger.

Child Welfare

- 99% of children in the foster care system receive health coverage through Medicaid. Babies and toddlers represent 33% of foster care entries
- Within the child welfare system, over 71,457 children are ages birth to three

Rural areas and small towns

- Nationwide, almost half (47%) of children rely on Medicaid coverage in small towns and rural areas.
- Hospitals in rural areas disproportionately rely on Medicaid to fund service delivery. In the past ten years 120 rural hospitals have either closed or eliminated inpatient services



My son [age 6, adopted from the foster care system at birth] has a congenital heart defect. He's had three open heart surgeries...We used private duty nursing [help with basic skills in the home] for most of his life, and then our Medicaid agency decided to cut those services. We had 40 hours a week for most of his life, and they just cut it off...I'm constantly fighting some fight to keep the service or to prove that I need the service.

~ Dina D., Oklahoma

Ensure Medicaid Can Continue to Serve Babies and Families

Proposals to reduce federal support for Medicaid, including through "per capita caps" or "block grants," will shift millions of dollars of costs to states. States will be forced to make decisions that could include:

- Restricting criteria for Medicaid eligibility, reducing the number of people covered;
- Decreasing benefits and access to services, as states may limit or eliminate coverage of certain treatments such as maternal depression screening;
- Eliminating mandatory benefits including EPSDT, Medicaid's signature benefit for children;
- Shift costs to families, who will be unable to afford care or be forced into medical debt.

Contact

ZERO TO THREE works to ensure all babies and toddlers benefit from the family and community connections critical to their well-being and development. Since 1977, the organization has advanced the proven power of nurturing relationships by transforming the science of early childhood into helpful resources, practical tools and responsive policies for millions of parents, professionals and policymakers.

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Learn more at
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