



Federal Legislation: The Latest COVID Relief Package in Congress

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care's position:

All of America's families should have the opportunity to live a healthy life and receive high-quality health care regardless of our race, ethnicity, or gender. As stakeholders working to advance health coverage, affordability, and equitable access for all people, we enthusiastically applaud the American Rescue Act, specifically the health coverage provisions. We appreciate this honest, non-partisan look at what has and hasn't worked in health reform, and the effort to fix the problems by improving the affordability of and access to health coverage. These steps are critical to beating the COVID-19 pandemic, promoting racial justice, and ensuring our nation's economic recovery. Health coverage, in particular, supports our nation's Black and Latinx families that have been hit hardest by the pandemic who are often working in essential jobs and on the front lines and are more likely to lose coverage or be uninsured.

First, we strongly support the American Rescue Plan's approach to improving health coverage affordability in the private market, building on the foundation of provisions in the existing health law and ensuring access to vaccines, centering the needs of communities of color. Specifically, we support provisions that:

- **Ensure premiums are more affordable for marketplace enrollees.** Eliminating premiums for people with incomes under about \$19,000 for a single person and \$39,000 for a family of four (150% of the federal poverty level), capping premium contributions for marketplace enrollees at 8.5 percent of income, and extending the availability of premium tax credits to people with incomes above \$51,000 for a single person and \$105,000 for a family of four (400% of the federal poverty level) will [make health coverage affordable](#), which is critical as America's families continue to endure in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Creating pathways for unemployed people to access health coverage.** Unemployment continues to rise and is strongly linked to uninsurance. We applaud provisions designed to protect families from repaying premium tax credits during financial instability and create new opportunities to access marketplace coverage. A third of these workers (32%) currently relying on unemployment insurance report not having enough food to eat, and nearly half (47%) have no confidence or only slight confidence in their ability to pay the next month's rent or mortgage.
- **Extend financial support to people who rely on COBRA for their health insurance.** Taken together, these provisions create a robust affordability package that would help millions of people across the country and will make a concrete difference in their lives as they recover from the pandemic and economic crisis.

- **Provide funding for COVID-19 vaccination efforts and support access to treatment and vaccination without cost-sharing.** Ensuring funds are available for a national vaccine strategy is vital to accelerating equitable distribution and vaccine take-up. Similarly, helping people access free vaccinations and needed treatment while they confront financial distress is essential to building collective health and economic recovery. As communities of color and Tribal Nations have disproportionately suffered during the pandemic, funding to medically underserved communities for testing, tracing, vaccines, and public outreach campaigns will be critical.

Second, we also appreciate that the American Rescue Plan includes provisions to make comprehensive health coverage available to the many people in American who cannot afford private coverage, even with the above provisions. The plan acknowledges the need to extend Medicaid to the people who cannot afford health insurance, a critical step to delivering America's families health and financial relief and changing the tide of this pandemic. In particular, we support:

- **Providing a financial incentive for states to open up Medicaid to all adults with incomes under 138% of the federal poverty level.** Giving states that newly expand a 5-percentage point increase in their *base* federal medical assistance percentage (or FMAP) for two years is substantial and necessary. More than 4 million uninsured people would gain Medicaid eligibility if the remaining states adopted the expansion. Of these, 60 percent are people of color. Providing these states with additional funds they could use to prevent cuts in social services, in addition to Medicaid, as the economic crisis evolves is a key component to delivering relief to America's families and ensuring recovery. Encouraging states to take up this option is crucial to beating the pandemic, as many people who would gain coverage are at elevated risk from COVID-19, whether because they face a high risk of becoming infected due to their occupation, or are especially vulnerable due to underlying health conditions.
- **Investing in Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) for older adults and people with disabilities.** The 7.35 increase in the federal matching rate for home and community-based services (HCBS) would encourage states to protect and expand these services that are crucial to the health and wellbeing of the older adults and people with disabilities who have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 virus.
- **Increasing Medicaid drug rebates paid by drug manufacturers.** By eliminating the cap on total drug rebates, Medicaid programs will produce significant savings for both the state and federal government. This provision has long had bipartisan and Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC) support and overdue. We applaud the inclusion of the rebate cap; it is vital to securing a robust package of health care coverage provisions that will help millions of people.