

HEALTH CARE REVIEW

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LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

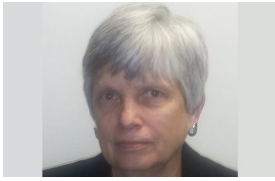
Looking to 2021 – In this Together

More great stories inside:

Written by [Jessica Ice](#), Ph.D.
Executive Director

We believe beyond any doubt that we in West Virginia are lucky to live in this beautiful mountain state – and we have been and will be in these tough times together. There is no doubt that 2020 was an incredibly hard year for all West Virginians: the national election created serious rifts inside families and communities, racial injustices demanded action, and COVID-19 left us struggling to meet new public health and economic challenges. When I find myself doubting our state's unity, I look to the Medicaid program that one-third of all West Virginians rely on for affordable health care. As a state, we moved as quickly and effectively as any state in the nation to respond to COVID-19. Our Department of Health and Human Services quickly putting into place a set of new Medicaid rules that helped people get on and stay on this important health insurance program. And there was support from consumers, providers, and policy-makers from all different political perspectives on board for these life-saving measures. As advocates for health care justice, 2021 offers a new season of opportunities to come together. First, instead of fighting continuous threats to Medicaid and to the Affordable Care Act from the White House and Congress, we will see new federal doors open for expanding affordable access to care.

One such opportunity will make it easier for our state to invest in the health of new families. We expect to see a change in federal law so that West Virginia can extend Medicaid to low-income Moms for 12 months after their baby is born. That is exciting! West Virginians know that Republicans and Democrats must work together. We expect that our legislators will not let party lines be the enemy of progress for our state. As an example, Delegate Evan Worrell, a Republican from Barboursville, is ready to lead a fight to create a new program for families above Medicaid income eligibility so that they can buy into Medicaid coverage. That too is exciting! We celebrate our successes in the 2020 legislature that again exemplify how we come together in West Virginia, including adding an adult dental benefit to Medicaid and eliminating the Medicaid waiting list for home-and community-based services for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. And looking to 2021, staying together and putting West Virginia families first, we will achieve more policy successes. And we will all be part of the personal and public challenges that are necessary to meet and defeat the COVID-19 crisis. With a vaccine on its way, and a spirit of community and "in it together," 2021 promises to be a great year. We at West Virginians for Affordable Health Care are looking forward to the work and working with you.



FIXING HEALTH CARE FLAWS GOING FORWARD, AND A RETURN TO THE WORK OF HOPE AND CHANGE

Written by [Sharon Carte](#)
Board President

The current pandemic has revealed a deep flaw in our current health care system. Since World War II the United States has provided the majority of its health care coverage through employment - unlike health care coverage in all other developed countries in the world. Now, as unemployment remains high under the pandemic, many of those laid off from their jobs have also lost their health care insurance. Families U.S.A., a health consumer advocacy group, reported between February to May of this year, over 5.4 million laid-off workers have lost health care insurance, a 39% increase-higher than any other previously seen annual increase. Even with the good news of vaccine delivery coming soon, there will be many who remain uninsured since many of those jobs will not return for some time. We all realize the ACA was a good solid start to building quality affordable health care for all, but it was not the final desired result. Many other system flaws remain. Small business plans are one focus. Children's coverage which improved greatly post-ACA had started to decline nationally, especially in states which did not expand Medicaid and some that had added burdensome work requirements which caused enrollment to drop. In 2021, however, a new administration begins and with it, new policies for building on past progress. Likely, the most promising quick fix to these flaws is to offer a WV Basic Health Plan as a public option which an incoming Biden Administration has signaled it hopes to do. You may find yourself thinking this sounds highly unlikely (as I did of late) – if you find majority support for major legislation in the U.S. Senate is not likely to favor major health care legislation or, because our recent state election results delivered a state legislature that you may perceive as unsympathetic to our cause. I would like to remind us all of how health care as a cause has grown such that those who not think of it as a right are now the minority-irrespective of party.

Because coverage was dealt a blow during the pandemic, it should be clearer than ever before: the strength of our economy is tied to the strength and well-being of all - especially frontline workers like those who deliver mail, stock food at grocery stores, haul away our trash, change linens at hospitals, etc. A West Virginia economy also needs this to recover from both a ravaging opioid scourge as well as the COVID pandemic. This will give our citizens a bridge back to work. Still dubious? One last point: at a recent online meeting of our [Medicaid Coalition](#), we had excellent presentations and discussion around the topic of a buy-in option. If you missed this discussion, it may hearten you to check it out – please email us at info@wvahc.org and we will send you a copy. A bipartisan approach combined with small business support could be just one sign of how strong the need for progress on health care reform still is in the public eye! This session we will be working with our coalition partners and others at this meeting to support legislation to get this done. Even if it cannot happen in the U.S. Congress, we must begin at the bottom-up work to make this happen. So, if you are one who has been feeling downcast at the tenor of things lately, I say to you “once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more...”. Please join us this coming year and start by making sure we have your correct contact information. [Of course ongoing financial support is always welcome!](#) Let's return to the work of becoming the change we wish to see!



A doctor in a white lab coat, blue shirt, and grey tie, with a green stethoscope around their neck, holds a black clipboard. The clipboard contains a message from the board of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care regarding COVID-19 compensation for frontline workers.

FRONTLINE WORKERS DESERVE WORKERS' COMPENSATION FOR COVID-19

A Message from our Board

As a health care organization, West Virginians for Affordable Health Care is particularly attuned to what is happening to those on the frontlines while the pandemic continues to ravage America. When we speak of frontlines, we mean the thousands of West Virginians who put their safety and well-being on the line so that their friends and neighbors can receive the essential things they need to survive. We offer our support and our gratitude to the nurses and other medical personnel showing up in hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, offices, and everywhere they are needed to care for our sick and dying—even at the expense of their own lives and health as many of these workers succumb to the virus. We support and are thankful for the workers who show up every day so that we get the food, utilities, services, and everything else that we depend on to get by each day—often with low pay and many times no health insurance or sick days themselves. Because of the sacrifices of thousands of West Virginians, we are able to continue.

Therefore, West Virginians for Affordable Health Care implores the state of West Virginia to take action to extend Workers' Compensation to all frontline workers who are infected with COVID-19; and, further, to assure that any frontline worker who does have COVID-19 work-related exposure on the job—is thus, presumed eligible for Workers' Comp—so that all West Virginians can show their appreciation and gratitude for the critical care and services show up to do their jobs.



LOOKING AT THE POST-ELECTION LANDSCAPE

Written by [Kat Stoll](#), Policy Director
And Director, West Virginians Together for Medicaid

At the Capitol

The West Virginia Statehouse now is in the hands of Republican supermajorities in both chambers of the Legislature and Republicans hold all major West Virginia statewide offices (governor, secretary of state, treasurer, auditor, agriculture commissioner and attorney general). A Republican supermajority is when more than two-thirds of Delegates (67) or Senators (23) are from the Republican party.

Supermajorities have extra power. First, this means a change in the composition of key legislative committees. Second, it means that Republicans do not have to reach out to Democrats in order to take many actions, including: override the Governor's veto of any items in the budget, pass procedural motions to speed up how fast a bill moves through the legislature, impeach judges, expulsion of legislators, and for adoption of a joint resolution to put a constitutional amendment referendum on the ballot. Votes that fit under these categories have been brought up recently in our legislature.

Numbers do matter but WVAHC and our allies have strong, positive relationships with many Republican leaders. Over the past several years, we have seen bipartisan support for key low-income health issues, and we have worked successfully with both parties. We have every reason to think we can secure bipartisan support for the goals in our [2021 Health Agenda](#) (see story below).

We also know that we can agree to disagree on some issues and still be allies on others. The key to success with the state legislature remains the same: provide fact-based information and analysis. Activate constituents to contact their legislators. Do not engage in personal attacks even in the heat of legislative battles. And always publicly thank any legislator who stands with us.

And in Washington

Under a President Biden administration, consumer advocates will have relief from regulatory and state waiver attacks on Medicaid such as work requirements and other eligibility restrictions. Yet some fights could arise about key state matching dollars funding mechanisms for the Medicaid program; hospitals and other providers as well as Medicaid Managed Care Organizations will be important allies to consumer advocates if these fights arise.

The Biden health agenda includes proactive incremental improvements to the ACA, creating a public option in the state marketplaces, increasing premium subsidies, and expanding eligibility for Medicare to folks at age 60 or older. These are big ideas that will be very tough to move in Washington. And any potential to move these initiatives certainly will depend on the outcome of the Georgia Senate run-off election on January 5th. Continued majority Republican control of the Senate could mean stalemate in Washington. Stay tuned.

Under any Georgia scenario, Senators Manchin and Capito will be key potential swing votes that have, at least in the past, broke with their parties on some health issues. It will be important that we let them know where West Virginians stand on key health votes.

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WEST VIRGINIA HEALTH AGENDA UPDATE

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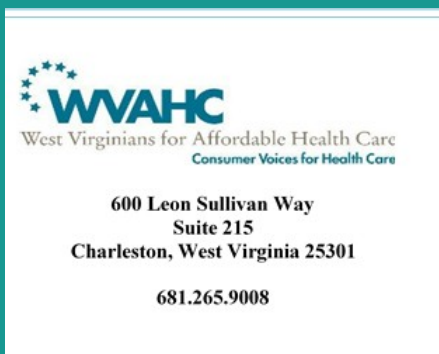
WVAHC led a coalition of organizations working together to achieve several important goals from our 2020 West Virginia Health Agenda and we hope to build on our success to move forward additional proactive initiatives in our [2021 Health Agenda](#). And we will continue to work together to defend the Medicaid program from budget cuts or harmful policy changes. In 2020, our victories included adding an adult dental benefit to Medicaid, eliminating the Medicaid waiting list for home- and community-based services for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, stopping a harmful Medicaid work requirement designed to cut people off the program, creating a prescription drug pricing transparency program, and stopping a ban on needle and syringe exchange programs.

In 2021, through a process that included local community input, we identified 10 goals for our newest West Virginia Health Agenda. While we recognize that some of our goals will require multiple years of education and advocacy, we can move some goals in the 2021 legislative session. A top priority for the coalition is creating a New Choice insurance program to provide adult West Virginians a new, more affordable, quality health insurance plan option.

Utilizing Medicaid administrative efficiencies and purchasing power, the plan would cost less per person than existing individual market plans.

In addition to creating a New Choice insurance program, other items in the [2021 Health Agenda](#) include:

- creating a Children's Health Insurance Choice program to close the children's coverage gaps
 - expanding Medicaid postpartum coverage for new moms from two months to one year
 - expanding the vision care benefit for adults in Medicaid
 - expanding Medicaid coverage of assisted living as an alternative to nursing home care
 - permanently expanding Medicaid telehealth services
 - creating a Minority Health Advisory Team to address health disparities and fund Community Health Equity Initiative Demonstration Projects
 - improving how Medicaid addresses non-medical factors that impact the health of Medicaid enrollees (for example a doctor might prescribe an air conditioner for a child with asthma)
 - addressing high prescription drug prices through a state Prescription Drug Affordability Board with authority to regulate high drug prices
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Kids' health in 2020 took an unexpected turn when COVID-19 appeared. Starting with the Spring semester, throughout the summer, and into fall, we have watched West Virginia's children show strength and resilience. However, school and daycare closures, lack of support, struggling families, and worry have all reminded us that there is a lot of work still to do to protect our children. The [Kids' Health Partnership](#) has worked this year to connect the people and organizations doing work for West Virginia's children. We hosted over a dozen targeted meetings and dedicated a segment of our Medicaid Summit to sharing information to better serve our youth while we continued to lift up positive policies. We have shared these with you over the year and now, as we turn our attention to 2021, we commit to remaining vigilant on kids' health issues. We are looking forward to continuing the [Kid's Health Partnership](#), partnering with new and old coalition organizations, and promoting kids' health throughout the new year.

To get involved with the Kids Health Partnership in 2021, email [Julianne Yacovone](mailto:julianne@wvahc.org) at julianne@wvahc.org.





West Virginia 501(c)3 Voter Engagement Table

Early this year, West Virginians for Affordable Health Care joined a growing coalition of groups and organizations focused on increasing civic engagement in WV. The c3 Table is a nonpartisan coalition working year-round to create a more accessible, inclusive, and representative democracy. The c3Table supports these efforts by leveraging and growing local capacity for voter engagement; deploying resources to maximize capacity; and raising new funds for nonpartisan progressive civic engagement projects.

This year, through the infrastructure of the Table, member organizations devoted time, pooled resources, supported common interests, and worked to increase local civic engagement and voter turnout among disenfranchised communities. The C3 Table project, Vote Together West Virginia, coordinated a digital and field strategy that helped achieved the following during the 2020 Primary and General election.

50+ volunteers and organizational staff trained
250,000+ text messages sent
300,000+ impressions on social media and
8,000+ phone calls to low propensity voters and residents.

The WV Voter Engagement Table is actively growing and seeking new members interested in building a long-term strategy for increasing civic engagement in communities across the state.

If you want to learn more, please contact, **Joanna** (Table Coordinator) at Johnna@fwvf.org



We are only as strong as your support!

Thanks to the generous support of our volunteers, donors, and supporters like you, West Virginians for Affordable Health Care is able to defend and protect Medicaid and other important programs for West Virginians. On behalf of our staff and board we say thank you ensuring that every West Virginian has access to affordable, quality health care.

We know that in the coming years, there will be attempts in Washington and in Charleston to undermine these programs that protect the physical and financial health of West Virginians. More than 650,000 West Virginians – children, adults with disabilities, seniors, and hard-working low-wage families - rely on Medicaid. Our fight is truly about saving the lives of our family, friends, and neighbors.

Today we are launching our end of the year campaign to raise funds to allow us to continue our important work. Would you be willing to make a special year-end donation of \$50, \$100 or whatever you can afford to help us to continue the fight for affordable health care in West Virginia? We simply can't do it without you. Your support will make a real, lasting impact on the health and wellbeing of West Virginians. Please know that all donations are tax deductible.

Membership Levels

\$20 Concerned Citizen

\$50 Health Booster

\$100 Mountain Strong

\$500 and up Health Care Champion

Action Supporter: Students/under-employed folks -- sign up as a member and share information on issues with friends; write letters to the editor to share your concerns on health care topics, make your legislators aware of how much health care issues mean to you!

Name:

Street:

City:

State:

Zip

Phone:

Email: (Please print clearly)

If you prefer to donate online, please click here!
