

Arkansas Community Organizations

Arkansas Community Institute

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Director Daniel Tsai
Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850
Medicaid.gov@cms.hhs.gov

Dear Director Tsai:

We are Arkansans who use Medicaid for our health coverage. For many of us, the coverage we receive through Medicaid has been life changing and for many life saving. We are writing you to thank you for your recent remarks that expressed concern about the Public Health Emergency (PHE) unwinding in Arkansas and to tell you about some of the experiences our members have been having with our state's PHE unwinding process. While we understand that each state has the authority to develop its own PHE unwinding process, we think that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) should look closely at the situation in Arkansas and make suggestions that can improve the process and protect the health coverage that so many of us need. We will provide some of our suggestions in this letter that could improve the process and help our people keep their health coverage.

Here are some of the problems that our members have experienced:

1. Many have a hard time understanding the letters they have received from the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS). For many, the letters are confusing.
2. Many of the letters contain wrong information about income and family size even though a Medicaid recipient has turned in their income and family information. Some people have turned in the correct information multiple times.
3. Some community members report that the letters go to their old address even though they have turned in an address change.
4. Several people on Social Security have reported that their monthly payment was reduced after DHS deemed them ineligible and withdrew the Medicaid Part B payments made to the federal government. In one case, a disabled person who has Social Security as his only income saw one of his Social Security

payments reduced from around \$1,000 to around \$500. His Medicaid was restored, but it took our advocacy to get DHS to return the funds taken from his Social Security.

5. There are many different Medicaid programs with different eligibility criteria and rules. We have found that some DHS employees are not aware of some of the rules and make decisions that adversely impact some recipients' health coverage. One such incident involved the Pickle Amendment that allows a COLA disregard for people who transitioned from SSI to Social Security.
6. Some community members report long wait times when they phone DHS or even report not being able to get through.
7. All eligibility determinations are done remotely and can present barriers to people who cannot navigate the internet or who do not have internet access. As mentioned above, they also experience problems when they call.

While the short six month timeline (due to end on September 30) cannot be extended unless the Arkansas state legislature goes into special session, there are some things that we think should be done to help community members keep or renew their Medicaid. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Have people at every county DHS office who can help resolve problems quickly and who are well trained and knowledgeable about Medicaid programs.
2. Keep cases where people were disenrolled because of paperwork issues open until at least December 31 so that people will not have to re-apply, but simply turn in the needed paperwork on income and family size
3. Do not withdraw Medicare Part B payments from Social Security checks of low-income people.
4. Develop a cover letter in simple English that can accompany all correspondence from DHS that gives a summary of actions taken by DHS as well as clear information on what recipients need to do to keep their coverage and who to contact for help.
5. Pause disenrollments until the PHE Unwinding is over.
6. Find better ways to reach people with clear information about the recertification process and help in recertifying.
7. Work with community organizations to find those people who lost coverage due to paperwork issues and help them restore their coverage if eligible.

Medicaid has helped so many children, families, seniors and disabled people get the health care they need in this state. Please work with the Arkansas Department of Human Services to help them understand that Medicaid is vital to health of our state.

Sincerely,

Joyce Means

Chair

Make Medicaid Better Campaign

Arkansas Community Organizations

Cc: Senator John Boozman

Senator Tom Cotton

Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders