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NEW YORK'S BUDGET NEGOTIATION SHOULD NOT JEOPARDIZE CRITICAL MEDICAID SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE NEW YORKERS

Cuts to So-called Optional Medicaid Services are Not Optional at All.

Albany, NY – Advocates from across the state called upon state elected officials not to pass devastating cuts in the safety-net that will jeopardize New York's health and safety. Cuts to people and services will cause an immediate skyrocketing of much more intensive and expensive Medicaid hospital and nursing home costs to the State and the counties. In addition, the State will also sacrifice federal dollars that flow into our local communities and create jobs.

Our seniors, people with disabilities and children are being endangered. Children without health care cannot fight H1N1. Adults without wheelchairs will be imprisoned in their homes. Diabetics with no dental care will rapidly develop uncontrolled bacterial and fungal infections that can be life-threatening.

Children using ventilators at home will be institutionalized and lose their childhoods. Individuals without eyeglasses or hearing aids won't be safe on the streets. Patients who don't understand their doctors because they speak a different language will take the wrong dose of medication and need hospital care. Seniors who can't get help with preparing a meal or shop for the necessities in life will undoubtedly end up in nursing homes that will only cost taxpayers even more money. Families on the edge will break without clinical psychological help.

This is the wrong medicine for New York—our Medicaid program keeps us safe and well. "We're better than this," stated many advocates.

"Balancing budgets should never be done on the backs of low-income people. Taking away the ability to access essential services – things like dental care, wheelchairs, oxygen tanks, and eyeglasses – would be unconscionable. People who use Medicaid should never be denied what they need to keep them healthy, safe and living in their homes."

-Lara Kassel, Coordinator, Medicaid Matters NY

"Children across the state with multiple severe disabilities depend on private duty nursing to be able to be cared for at home by their families. If this benefit is removed, as proposed, they will end up being removed from loving homes to institutions which will cost the Medicaid system far more money and will take an incalculable toll in anguish on their parents, brothers and sisters."

-Heidi Siegfried, Director, New Yorkers for Accessible Health Care

"Wheelchairs, glasses and hearing aids are our legs, eyes and ears, they are our independence. Taking them away is just not human."

-Susan Dooha, Executive Director, Center for Independence of the Disabled NY

“Cutting services to the frail elderly in the Medicaid program is no way to balance a state budget. Eliminating certain personal care services for the poor elderly will only lead to more expensive institutional care for New York taxpayers down the road.”

-Lois Aronstein, New York State Director, AARP

“California pursued this route and cut services that assisted the disabled and elderly with activities of daily living. Those cuts were blocked by court action. Expert testimony in that case warned of premature deaths and a humanitarian crisis. I think we would face the same things here in New York were we to cut personal care services for our Medicaid population.”

-Trilby de Jung, Health Law Attorney, Empire Justice Center

“While the Minority Conferences may think that this is all about politics, the lives of people with disabilities hang in the balance. We’ve put forth substantive and rational cost-savings proposals, but all they’ve had to offer are unconscionable cuts to vital Medicaid services, such as personal care, which enable people with disabilities to live independently at home.”

-Bruce Darling, CEO, Center for Disability Rights

"The Commission on the Public's Health System (CPHS) urges right thinking people in the Senate and Assembly to reject the minority parties proposals to slash and burn parts of Medicaid. If they are allowed to cut out critical 'optional' services from coverage, such as dental and eye care, it will have a dramatic impact on children and their families. To make it worse, the Senate minority is also talking about cutting 'optional' populations from Medicaid coverage. At a time when there is an epidemic and health status of children in many communities of color is very troubling. There are no optional populations."

-Judy Wessler, Director, Commission on the Public's Health System

“The Republican Minority proposal to restrict and reduce income eligibility for Child Health Plus would prevent children from accessing needed health care services and would produce poor health outcomes and trigger the need for more costly interventions for years to come.”

-Jennifer March-Joly, Executive Director, Citizens' Committee for Children

“The Governor and Legislators need to stop dead in their tracks the proposal to cut Medicaid Optional services and populations before poor New Yorkers living with AIDS and HIV, overwhelmingly black and Latino/a, are found dead on the tracks. It is absolutely unconscionable that the Republican leadership would not only severely compromise the health and well-being of our poorest and frailest but also turn back critically needed federal dollars in the process. This proposal is a pound foolish without even being penny-wise.”

-terri smith-caronia, Vice President of New York Advocacy and Public Policy, Housing Works

"People with disabilities need personal care, durable medical equipment like wheelchairs, and other so-called 'optional services' to stay out of nursing homes and other institutions and live independently in their communities. State leaders should not balance the budget by sacrificing the freedom of people with disabilities and seniors and increasing state costs by forcing people into nursing homes that cost the state far more."

-Melanie Shaw, Executive Director, New York Association on Independent Living

“Seniors and people with disabilities who rely on Personal Care Level I services aren’t doing so because it’s an option – they do so because they need these essential services to live their lives. It is dangerous to even think that simply because the service isn’t federally mandated that it is optional / irrelevant!”

-Constance Laymon and Barbara Diesem-Zimmons, Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Association of New York State

“Level I or housekeeping services prevent accidents that send frail seniors and people with disabilities into the hospital and into nursing homes, saving the system money”

-Valerie Bogart, Director, Evelyn Frank Legal Resources Program, Selfhelp Community Services

“Proposals to cut Medicaid optional benefits will not only jeopardize the health of hundreds of thousands of vulnerable New Yorkers, their loss will actually drive up health care costs. For example, the Medicaid rehab option forms the basis for the most progressive community-based mental health services, and, in doing so, prevents countless costly emergency room visits and hospital admissions. The Legislature must reject this fundamentally flawed approach.”

-Harvey Rosenthal, Executive Director, New York Association for Psychological Rehabilitation Services

“Any proposed cut to Child Health Plus reneges on New York’s promise to provide universal health care for its children. During a recession when families are losing their private health insurance at record rates, this is shameful.”

-Karen Schimke, President and CEO, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy and Convener, New York Children’s Action Network

“There really is nothing ‘optional’ about providing dental services to the most vulnerable people of New York State. Oral health is imperative if New Yorkers are to have a basic quality of life and successful management of multiple chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and early childhood caries. The idea of cutting ‘optional’ dental services along with other health services is unfathomable. New York has always been a leader in this regard and should continue uninterrupted as we work our way out of the economic situation we find ourselves in today.”

-Lucy Bianco, R.D.H., President, Dental Hygienists Association of the State of New York, Inc.

“Any proposal to roll-back eligibility for Child Health Plus will harm thousands of children who will have no other option for health coverage. Child Health Plus is the most cost-effective way to cover children. Any proposal that causes sick children to lose coverage and forces them to seek their health care at emergency rooms is both expensive and short-sighted.”

-Emma Jordan Simpson, Executive Director, Children’s Defense Fund-New York

“Cuts to dental services will not save significant money, will drive patients to expensive emergency room care, risk lives due to untreated infections, reduce employability in people already in financial distress, add to the health burden of chronic disease patients and further increase the health disparities. Dental care improves the lives and health of patients and reduces costs to the health care system.”

-Ron Salyk, Dental Director, Morris Heights Health Center, Bronx NY, and Vice President, NYS Oral Health Coalition