

2/10/2020



Dear Senator Heider,

In Idaho, we all share the goal of ensuring that our kids have access to health coverage early, so they have a better chance to be healthy, do well in school, and succeed in life. Unfortunately, Idaho is falling behind.

Starting last year, Idaho Voices for Children identified a troubling trend in health coverage for children. Between 2017 and 2018, Idaho had the highest increase in the rate of uninsured children in the country, with approximately 7,200 children losing health coverage. We tracked this trend and investigated possible causes for this sharp decline. Following years of steady progress, Idaho's declines are part of a national trend where the number of uninsured children in the country increased from 4.7 percent in 2016 to 5.2 percent in 2018.

As we continued to investigate this decline, we learned that Idaho saw the steepest child enrollment decline in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in the nation. Between December 2017 and February 2019, Idaho's Medicaid/CHIP child enrollment dropped 11 percent. While private coverage rates in Idaho remained steady in 2018, this drastic decrease in public coverage indicates enrollment declines in Medicaid/CHIP are driving up Idaho's rate of uninsured kids.

The significant drop of insured children in Idaho is extremely troubling and likely due to federally required changes in the enrollment and renewal processes in Idaho's Medicaid programs that have put new barriers in place for children and families. Families with children on Medicaid are now required to submit more paperwork and overcome additional red tape to access or maintain health coverage for their children.

In spite of this alarming trend in kids' coverage in Idaho, the state is poised to stem this tide in the coming years. Idaho expanded Medicaid in January, resulting in more families and children becoming insured. States *without* Medicaid expansion are seeing three-times the rate of increases in uninsured children as states that expanded Medicaid. Children in non-expansion states are almost twice as likely to be uninsured as those in states that closed the coverage gap.

I encourage you to look at Idaho Voices for Children's full report on this issue, and I seek your partnership to implement the following recommendations to further mitigate declines in kids' coverage:

- 1) Increase income eligibility thresholds for both children and pregnant women in Idaho. Nationally, Idaho's current income eligibility thresholds in both categories rank at the bottom.
- 2) Streamline the renewal process for families with children on Medicaid so they can access the services they need and deserve. This will help eliminate unnecessary gaps in coverage, reduce expensive emergency room visits, increase efficiencies in the program, and ensure better value.

We look forward to working with you to turn these trends around and ensure more Idaho children get the care they need to grow healthy and succeed in life.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liz Woodruff".

Liz Woodruff, Co-Director

Idaho Voices for Children

1607 W Jefferson St. Boise, ID 83702

THIS SIDE INTENTIONALLY

LEFT BLANK

Idaho Children Are Losing Health Coverage

State Saw Steepest Increase in Child Uninsured Rate in 2018
Winter/Spring 2020

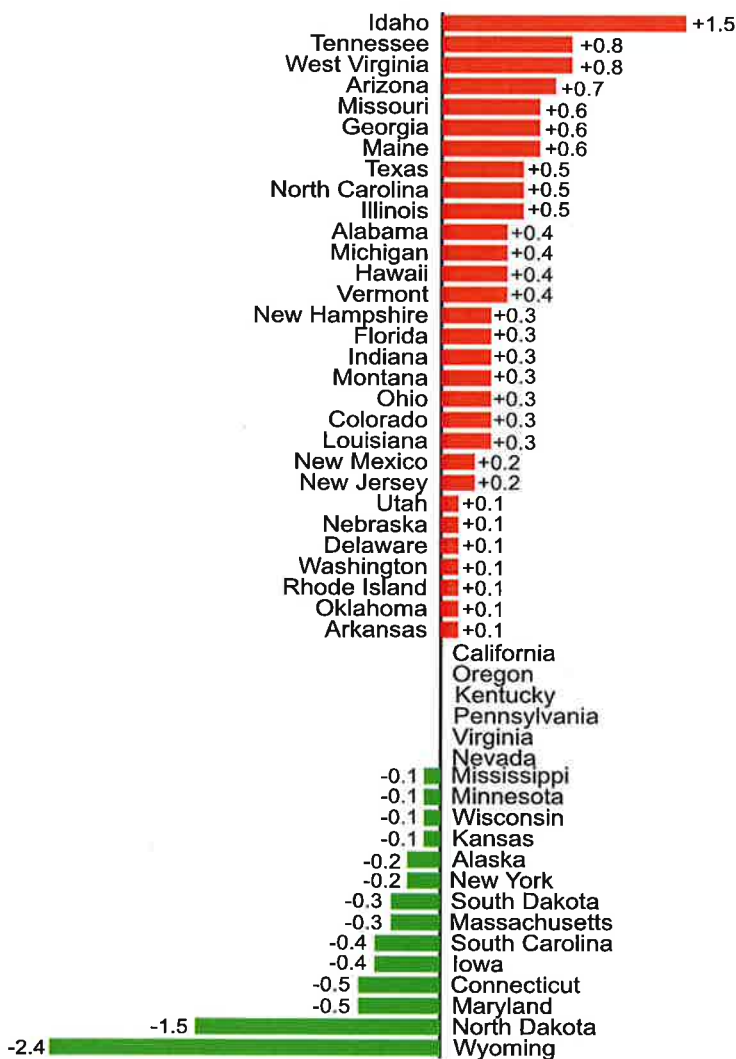


Healthy children are critical to thriving communities in Idaho. Having health insurance increases the likelihood that children will get necessary medical services and even be more likely to graduate from high school, creating ripple effects that benefit us all.¹ Following years of steady progress, newly released data shows Idaho's child uninsured rate changed direction in 2018 – resulting in thousands of additional kids going without essential health coverage in Idaho.

Coverage losses appear to be driven by new administrative barriers to renewal for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). These coverage losses are particularly concerning because they occurred during a period of economic growth when children should have been gaining health coverage. It is time for lawmakers to turn their attention to policies that increase health coverage instead of adding more red tape to programs that help Idahoans make ends meet.

Idaho's Child Uninsured Rate Increase Worst in the Nation

Figure 1: Percentage Point Change in Child Uninsured Rates, 2017 to 2018



Source: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Idaho is at the top of a concerning national trend in children's health coverage. For the second year in a row, the national uninsured rate among children has gone in the wrong direction, rising to 5.2 percent in 2018, or more than one in 20 kids. States that did not expand Medicaid to parents and other adults saw their child uninsured rate increase three times as much from 2016 to 2018 as states that did, according to the Georgetown Center for Children and Families.²

Idaho's child uninsured rate increased at a considerably faster pace than any other state from 2017 to 2018.³ Reversing years of coverage gains, the number of Idaho children without any health insurance increased by 7,200 in 2018. Before then, Idaho had not seen an increase since comparable data started being collected in 2008.

Idaho also saw the largest uninsured rate increase across all ages in 2018.⁴ The number of Idahoans without health coverage rose to 192,600 in 2018, an increase of 20,600 people compared to the year prior. Disturbingly though, uninsured rates among children increased more than any other age group in Idaho.⁵ For example, for every 10 uninsured young adults (19-34 yrs) in 2017, just under one additional young adult went uninsured in 2018, but for every 10 uninsured children (<19 yrs) in 2017, more than 3 additional children went uninsured in 2018.⁶

Drops in Medicaid and CHIP Coverage Drive Child Uninsured Rate Increase

While some have argued that the strong economy led children to move to employer sponsored insurance, private coverage rates in Idaho remained consistent while public coverage decreased last year. Idaho experienced the steepest child enrollment decline in Medicaid and CHIP in the nation, dropping 11 percent from December 2017 to February 2019 according to Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families.⁷ This decline is driving an increase in Idaho's child uninsured rate.

Medicaid and CHIP provide health coverage to children who live with disabilities and in families facing low wages. The uninsured rate barely moved for children living in higher income households but nearly doubled among children with family incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL). This is deeply concerning given the additional barriers these families already face and the serious economic consequences of being exposed to medical debt or bankruptcy.

Figure 2: Uninsured Rates for Idaho Children Under 19

Household Income as Percentage of Poverty Level	2017	2018	Change
Under 200% FPL (<\$50,200 annual income for a family of four)	3.6%	7.1%	+ 3.5% pts
Over 200% FPL (>\$50,200 annual income for a family of four)	5.0%	5.3%	+ 0.3% pts

Source: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Hispanic/Latinx Idahoans Continue to Face More Barriers to Health Coverage

Hispanic/Latinx Idahoans face additional barriers to health coverage like lower wages, having an employer that doesn't offer health insurance, and recent policy changes that deter eligible families from seeking coverage through Medicaid.⁸ Idaho Hispanic/Latinx children have a higher uninsured rate than their white peers, at 8.0 and 5.9 percent respectively.

Children in both demographic groups saw an increase in their uninsured rate in 2018 compared with the year prior. However, the change is only statistically significant for white children – in part because changes are harder to detect among Idaho's relatively small communities of color.

Figure 3: Health Insurance Coverage Among Idahoans by Age and Demographics, 2018

	Number Uninsured	Percent Uninsured
Children Under 19		
White Alone, Non-Hispanic/Latinx	21,000	5.9%
Hispanic/Latinx	6,900	8.0%
Non-Elderly Adults 19-64		
White Alone, Non-Hispanic/Latinx	110,100	13.9%
Hispanic/Latinx	42,300	34.3%
All Ages		
White Alone, Non-Hispanic/Latinx	131,500	9.3%
Hispanic/Latinx	49,400	22.6%

Source: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Recent Policy Changes Leading to Harmful Coverage Losses Among Idaho Children

Most uninsured children are eligible for Medicaid or CHIP but are not currently enrolled. A key to reducing the child uninsured rate is for federal and state policies to make it easier for families to enroll and retain their public coverage. Changes over the last two years appear to have made it harder for families to enroll and renew their eligible children in Medicaid and CHIP. Families in Idaho continue to report new red tape barriers and mounting confusion over how to receive or maintain health coverage for their children. Harmful changes included requiring families to submit more paperwork to maintain their health coverage, cuts in various funding sources for outreach to eligible children and families, eliminating the individual mandate penalty, and dozens of policy choices creating a pervasive climate of fear and confusion for eligible immigrant families.

Recommendations

Medicaid and CHIP enrollment continues to decline this year, raising the threat of a continued increase in the child uninsured rate. State officials can help stem the tide. Idaho has several clear opportunities to get back on the right track and keep kids covered.

Ensure families understand the re-enrollment process and eliminate unnecessary paperwork burdens.

1

Recent changes now force families to jump through additional hoops to verify their incomes and prove their eligibility for programs. Idaho should require more advanced notification or alternate ways of reaching out to families before they lose coverage by improving the rules governing the process in Idaho Administrative Code 16.03.01.

Raise Medicaid/CHIP eligibility for children from 185% FPL to 255% FPL.

2

Idaho has one of the lowest income eligibility levels for children in the nation, leaving low-wage working families with few options to cover their children.⁹ Coverage is often out of reach for children in this income range because premium assistance is based on ensuring the employee's coverage is affordable, not coverage for the entire family. Lawmakers could raise child eligibility to the national average of 255% FPL to help children who are experiencing the largest uptick in uninsured rates.

Raise Medicaid/CHIP eligibility for pregnant women from 138% FPL to 200% FPL.

3

Providing more women with access to health coverage during pregnancy is an important step to making sure children are born healthy and stay healthy. Raising Idaho's eligibility to the national average would help counteract recent coverage losses because when mothers have health coverage their children are more likely to as well.

Expand Medicaid without additional barriers to coverage.

4

The rate of uninsured children grew three times as fast from 2016 to 2018 in states that did not expand Medicaid compared to states that expanded Medicaid.¹⁰ Idaho's now implemented Medicaid expansion should prove very helpful to curb recent declines in health coverage among kids, because when parents are covered, kids are more likely to be covered. To realize the full benefits of Medicaid expansion for families, Idaho should continue to fund it without imposing barriers to coverage.

Continuous health coverage is critical for Idaho's children and strengthens our communities. Health coverage not only improves children's health and educational outcomes, but also improves their earning potential when they grow up and protects their families from medical debt and bankruptcy. Idaho is now moving backwards on this key child health metric of children's insurance rates. Idaho's sudden drop in children's health coverage can only be stopped if policy makers rally around our shared goal of ensuring that all children have access to affordable, comprehensive health insurance.

This research was funded in part by the Annie E Casey Foundation. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation.

Endnotes

- 1 Levine and Schanzenbach's [paper](#) summarizes some of this evidence well.
- 2 Alker, J. and Roygardner, L., "The Number of Uninsured Children is on the Rise," Georgetown University Center for Children and Families, October, 2019.
- 3 U.S. Census Bureau, "2010-2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table DP03," accessed on Sept. 20, 2019.
- 4 U.S. Census Bureau, "Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States," accessed on Sept. 20, 2019.
- 5 U.S. Census Bureau, "2017-2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B27010," accessed on Sept. 20, 2019.
- 6 U.S. Census Bureau, "2017-2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B27010," accessed on Sept. 20, 2019.
- 7 Brooks, T., "New Data Find Troubling Decline in Child Enrollment in Medicaid and CHIP Continues in Many States," Georgetown University Health Policy Institute, Jun. 19, 2019.
- 8 U.S. Census Bureau, "2016-2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table C27001H and C27001I," accessed on Sept. 20, 2019.
- 9 Kaiser Family Foundation, "Where Are States Today? Medicaid and CHIP Eligibility Levels for Children, Pregnant Women, and Adults," Mar. 31, 2019.
- 10 Alker, J. and Roygardner, L., "The Number of Uninsured Children is on the Rise," Georgetown University Center for Children and Families, October, 2019.

Note: The term white is used for simplicity in this report to refer to white non-Hispanic/Latinx people.

Grady's Story

Star, Idaho



Medicaid is a critical lifeline for Grady. It provides treatments he needs to address his Serious Emotional Disturbance disorder.

Kimberly explained:

“When you have a child that suffers from a serious emotional and behavioral disorder, it is incredibly stressful on families and even more so trying to jump through hoops to keep the coverage we qualify for. Access to the care my son needs is so crucial and we work so hard to stay on top of everything. We work hard to do everything right so there aren't lapses in coverage or treatment. Yet, we still lost coverage.”

After a long and time-consuming reapplication process, Grady finally regained the same Medicaid coverage he suddenly lost. Lapses in coverage, like Grady's, mean potential setbacks for him and his ability to function in his home and community. Idaho must ensure its renewal process is streamlined and clear for families like Grady's, so children in Idaho are able to access the health coverage they need to thrive.

Despite Grady relying on Medicaid for the specialized care he needs, the eleven-year-old's coverage was unexpectedly terminated in December. The devastating surprise left Grady and his parents out in the cold.

Kimberly and Tim are a veteran family living in Star with their four children. They manage a ranch and run a treatment program that combines equine therapy, psychotherapies, and whole food nutrition for kids with disabilities and veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. Their son Grady receives Medicaid health coverage through the Youth Empowerment Services (YES) Program in Idaho, a strengths-based and family-centered approach to providing individualized care for children.

Medicaid is a critical lifeline for Grady. It provides treatments he needs to address his Serious Emotional Disturbance disorder and makes it possible for him to be healthy and successful. **Nevertheless, Kimberly discovered that Grady lost his Medicaid coverage on December 31, 2019.**

Kimberly was stunned to learn about the coverage termination while Grady waited for one of his regular services. Kimberly didn't receive a notice from the Department of Health and Welfare until two weeks later, indicating Grady had lost Medicaid coverage because of issues with the online renewal system. Kimberly thought she was doing everything correctly, but stated that she was never informed up front about new steps she needed to take to make sure her son's coverage was renewed.



Kimberly and Tim are a veteran family living in Star with their four children.

Promoting a Healthy Start in Life

Idaho Voices for Children champions policies that help kids and families thrive. We advance strategies that promote a healthy start in life and ensure access to affordable health coverage for every Idahoan.

Learn more about Idaho Voices for Children and share your own health care story at idahovoices.org.

