

Defending Medicaid and Containing Costs: What Can Consumers Do?

Keeping Medicaid strong this year will almost certainly require additional aid from the federal government as well as new state-generated revenue. Consumers can:

Advocate for additional federal funds. Urge state leaders and members of Congress to push for immediate federal relief. Find real-life examples illustrating the importance of Medicaid as a safety net during difficult economic times and share these stories with legislators and media. Target the media in areas where there are high levels of Medicaid participation, and where employment may be sagging, causing working families to turn to public programs – perhaps for the first time – for health insurance. Identify and work with other stakeholders, such as safety net hospitals and community health centers that benefit from a strong Medicaid program.

Advocate for increasing state assessments on hospitals and nursing homes to help fund Medicaid. This money can help states bring in additional federal matching funds.

Propose other revenue increases, such as tobacco taxes. Earmarking these funds for health care can bolster state spending on Medicaid and increase federal contributions.

To improve quality and contain costs in the longer run, consumers should press leaders to think beyond crisis management. Consumers can:

Research strategies used in other states. Learn the potential and track records of specific cost containment strategies and advocate for these alternatives to Medicaid cuts. Many modifications to Medicaid occur through administrative changes and may require federal approval, but improvements can also be achieved through state legislation.

Develop coalitions to advance initiatives such as evidence-based prescribing of drugs and coordinated care for patients with chronic illnesses. Quality and cost coalitions may include non-traditional allies, such as businesses and providers.

Generate stories from adults and children who have chronic health needs to make the case for coordinated care. In addition, stories about poor outcomes can support the need for evidence-based medicine. Share these stories with leaders who can make changes to the Medicaid program in state budget hearings, meetings with state and local leaders, and through the media.

Get involved in state Medicaid decisions. Become involved with your state Medical Care Advisory Committee. By law, these committees must include consumers. Use this venue to bring the consumer perspective to state Medicaid administrators.