

Medicaid Health Coverage

How vulnerable Alaskans are at risk

What are Medicaid Services and Who Do They Serve?

Medicaid offers health coverage for Alaskans unable to afford their own healthcare, or who are at-risk of institutionalization. Medicaid covers eligible low-income families, children, pregnant women, people with disabilities, elderly, blind, and certain adults between the ages of 19 and 64 years.

Medicaid is funded with both federal and state dollars. In Alaska, the program is managed by the Alaska Department of Health & Social Services (DHSS).

For many Alaska Mental Health Trust (Trust) beneficiaries,¹ Medicaid provides access to community-based health services that help 'level the playing field' so seniors and people with disabilities can live at home in their communities instead of in expensive institutional care.

In Alaska, Medicaid-reimbursable services include assisted living, day habilitation, personal care attendants, case management, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, medication management, transportation, supportive housing, and more.

Medicaid also plays a critical role in the state's ability to address its opioid epidemic. Medicaid reimbursement to behavioral health treatment providers ensures they can continue to serve low- or no-income clients,

thus increasing their clients' chance of remaining stable, clean, and sober.

Additionally, access to home and community-based support services reduces the likelihood that vulnerable Alaskans will end up homeless, in crisis, admitted to intermediate or inpatient care, or have involvement with the criminal justice system.

What Happens When Medicaid Is Cut?

Community-based services reimbursed by Medicaid provide jobs for healthcare professionals and paraprofessionals—all of whom contribute to a healthy workforce and strong Alaskan economy. When Medicaid funds are reduced, community providers are at-risk of losing clients and closing their doors.

A family taking care of a senior with dementia can lose their ability to care for their loved one at home if their Medicaid coverage is eliminated or reduced.

A person with a developmental disability may lose valuable access to rehabilitation, access to community activities, and assistance with normal daily routines.

Justice-involved individuals struggling with untreated addiction or mental illness are more likely to relapse and return to prison due to additional criminal activity.

State and local governments will pay for their most vulnerable citizens, either on the

back-end with expensive emergency and institutional care, or on the front-end with less expensive and more effective community support services.

The Trust and partner advisory boards support funding Medicaid services at adequate levels to prevent increasing costs to other parts of our system, such as hospitals and state-funded institutional services that include nursing homes, Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) and the Department of Corrections (DOC).

Moving Forward with the 1115 Behavioral Health Medicaid Waiver

The federal Medicaid Section 1115 Demonstration Waiver allows states the flexibility to design, redesign, and improve their Medicaid services and programs.

Alaska's application to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for mental health and substance use disorder services via the 1115 Behavioral Health Medicaid Waiver (1115 Waiver) was approved in 2019, and new Medicaid services are being rolled out by region over the next few years.

The 1115 Waiver allows Medicaid

dollars to pay for specialized services for youth and adults with mental illness and/or substance use disorders, including Alaskans at-risk for involvement with the state's Office of Children's Services (OCS) and Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) that have previously not been reimbursable.

The intent of Alaska's 1115 Waiver is to create a data-driven, integrated behavioral health system of care for Alaskans experiencing serious mental illness (SMI), severe emotional disturbance, substance use disorder (SUD), co-occurring substance use with mental illness, and at-risk families and children.

Home and Community-Based Waiver Services (HCBS)

Seniors and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) utilize Medicaid for Home and Community-Based Waiver Services for daily and long term supports. Without HCBS, many if not most Alaskans with significant IDDs and seniors with Alzheimer's disease and dementia (ADRD) would have to leave their homes or communities for institutionalized care, at a much greater expense.

The Trust and partner advisory boards support adequate funding for Medicaid services for Alaskans with disabilities, including people with behavioral health disorders, across the lifespan, so they can remain in their communities and out of expensive institutional care. ❖

¹ Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries include Alaskans with mental illness, substance use disorders (SUD), Intellectual/Developmental Disorders (IDD), including fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD), Alzheimer's disease and related dementia (ADRD), and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

For more information, go to: www.alaskamentalhealthtrust.org/jointadvocacy