

## **Denial of Benefits Bills SB 567**

The Denial of Benefits Bill is a harmful bill will wreak havoc on the state's Medicaid system, terminating eligible patients from the program and creating a public health nightmare for the state. While it claims to close loopholes in the state's current public benefits system, in reality the Denial of Benefits bill is a punitive and unnecessary attack on our state's most vulnerable population's access to vital programs.

### **Under the Denial of Benefits Bill, Eligible Citizens will Lose Medicaid Benefits**

Currently, to qualify for Medicaid, a citizen must provide a declaration of citizenship or satisfactory immigration status and may be required to provide additional verification of citizenship or satisfactory immigration status. SB 567, however, poses additional burdens on eligible applications. Many qualified individuals who desperately need access to health care services will unfairly and unnecessarily be denied under SB 567's requirements.

Many Medicaid recipients simply do not have the required documentation. According to a 2006 report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, U.S. born adults with incomes below \$25,000 are almost twice as likely as adults with incomes above \$25,000 to report not having a passport or birth certificate. By requiring applicants to provide documentation, SB 567 will place insurmountable barriers on these eligible recipients. Thus many eligible Medicaid recipients will be forced to go without health care.

Obtaining the required documentation will prove difficult for many. In Wisconsin, to request a copy of your birth certificate you must produce one of the following sources of identification: Wisconsin driver's license, Wisconsin photo ID or a government issued employee ID. Many eligible residents will not have any of these required sources of identification. In addition, the costs of obtaining birth certificates for families may be entirely prohibitive. You must pay \$12 upfront for the Office of Vital Records to perform the search—this charge is required even if the search does not produce a birth certificate. For non-English speaking citizens obtaining a birth certificate from Vital Records office could be next to impossible since they may not be able to navigate the complex administrative process necessary to obtain the documents. The same scenario would ring true for other marginalized populations like the homeless or those patients without checking accounts or credit cards to pay Vital Records in advance for the documentation. Thus many eligible citizens will simply be unable to obtain the necessary documentation.

As a result of the Denial of Benefits bill, eligible Medicaid patients will be shut out from the basic health care they need. Without access to this critical preventative care, rates of unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and undetected cervical cancer will increase.

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## **The Denial of Benefits Bill Will Result in INCREASED Costs to the State**

Since fewer eligible Medicaid recipients will be obtaining critical preventative health care services, health care costs as a whole for the state will increase. When patients cannot obtain preventative health care, they often wait until their health conditions become serious, complicated and expensive before seeking treatment. Then, the only option patients have for treatment is the most expensive option—emergency room treatment.

This lack of access to preventative health care will endanger the public health and increase taxpayer costs. For example, Wisconsin is experiencing an epidemic of sexually transmitted infections, particularly Chlamydia. Wisconsin has the 10<sup>th</sup> highest Chlamydia rate in the country, the highest in the Midwest. Women infected with Chlamydia often do not have any symptoms. If left untreated, Chlamydia can lead to infertility, pelvic inflammatory disease, endometriosis and cervical cancer. In addition, men and women with certain STIs like Chlamydia are 3 to 5 times more likely to contract HIV (Wasserheit, 1992). Infants can become infected with Chlamydia during birth, causing conjunctivitis, bronchiolitis, and pneumonia (PPFA, 1997). Chlamydia is the leading cause of neonatal conjunctivitis (CDC, 1993).

The bottom line is that when patients cannot obtain preventative reproductive health care, the result is a greater population with more dangerous and costly reproductive health conditions.

In addition to the cost increase due to public health problems, SB 567 will also create new administrative costs and burdens for the state. The bill requires administrative staff to spend time and resources ensuring that the proper documentation is provided. For those eligible residents who do not have birth certificates or passports, state workers will spend more time and resources leading residents through the administrative system to obtain these documents.

At the end of the day, the result of the Denial of Benefits bill will be eligible residents being barred from public assistance programs like Medicaid. The ramifications of fewer people being able to access preventative health care services will be increased rates of unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and undetected cervical cancer. As these public health problems increase, so will cost to the taxpayers.