

Affordable Care Act, Medicaid and Community Options

4/2/17

Although last week's canceled vote on the repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act has taken this issue off the table for the time being, the funding cuts that had been proposed for Medicaid would have had a profound impact on people with intellectual disabilities.

I vigorously avoid wading into contentious political debates, but on this issue, I owe it to the people we serve, their families and our agency. Issues around Medicaid have far more implications than health insurance alone.

Much of the debate around health care and the ACA describes Medicaid in terms of it providing health insurance for people who are poor or who have disabilities. While that is true, for most of the people we serve, Medicaid is not only their health insurance plan, it is also the funding through which they receive all of their services and supports. It is Medicaid that pays for adults to be fed, bathed, dressed, and toileted, if they require that level of support. For people who don't require that type of support, Medicaid pays us to help them find and keep community jobs; buy groceries, balance



Community Options Ink

By Tom Turner

their checkbooks; explore and connect with their communities. The children who qualify for our Children's Extensive Support program have intense medical and/or behavioral issues, and through Medicaid we provide support that enables families to keep their children at home rather than seeking out-of-home placements that are not only heartbreaking, but also very expensive to taxpayers. In short, Medicaid not only provides health insurance that enables the people we serve to live healthy lives, it also provides the cost-effective services and support that enables them to live in non-institutional settings and have happy, fulfilling, interconnected lives in their community.

Over the past several weeks I read many analyses of the proposed Medicaid cuts, and some estimates jumped out. Several sources estimated that federal Medicaid funding would have been cut by 25 percent, and that it would have cost the State of Colorado \$800M to backfill that cut. I have no idea if those estimates are accurate, but I do know the services that we provide are essential to the most vulnerable people in our communities. The vast majority of funding for the services provided by Community Options comes via Medicaid, and while we are a very lean agency with administrative overhead of only 11 percent, we already struggle to remain viable at current Medicaid funding levels.

I seriously doubt we have heard the last of proposed cuts to Medicaid. Any cuts will require reductions in the quantity and/or quality of our services, and that is something our friends and family members with disabilities don't deserve.

Tom Turner is executive director of Community Options Inc. in Montrose.