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2018 POLICY PRIORITY: STOP PROPOSED MEDICAID WORK RESTRICTIONS

Background

Most people enrolled in SoonerCare who can reasonably be expected to work, do work. However, for the first time in Medicaid's fifty-year history, the Trump Administration is allowing states to require adults on Medicaid to have a job in order to keep their coverage. Ten states have already applied for federal permission to do so, and more are expected to follow suit.

However, research shows that work requirements are a solution in search of a problem. Just 1 in 10 SoonerCare enrollees are nondisabled working-age adults.

All of the nondisabled adult SoonerCare enrollees are very low-income parents, and the vast majority of them already work. The few adult Medicaid enrollees who aren't employed have good reasons for not working, including illness or disability, taking care of a child or aging parent, being in school, or being retired. In a perfectly designed system, screenings would exempt these individuals from a work requirement – but if a work requirement were underfunded or poorly implemented, thousands of low-income parents could lose the health coverage they need.

SoonerCare provides basic health care to low-income Oklahomans; it's not a jobs program. While research shows that having access to health care can remove barriers work, there's no indication that tethering health coverage to work results in either better health or increased employment. A work requirement won't expunge a criminal record, provide affordable child care or elder care, create reliable public transportation, end hiring discrimination, make education more affordable, treat a mental health or substance use disorder, or generate jobs where there simply aren't any. If the state wants to get more unemployed Oklahomans into stable, good-paying jobs, addressing these problems are all much better places to start.

The Solution

Lawmakers should reject efforts to tie access to safety net programs to employment and should instead recognize that access to basic medical care can support employment.

What You Can Do

Contact your state Representative and Senator and ask them to reject attempts to tie SoonerCare coverage to employment.

You can look up your Senator and Representative at <http://okpolicy.org/find-your-legislator/>, call the House switchboard at 405-521-2711, and call the Senate switchboard at 405-524-0126.

To receive SMS advocacy alerts on important health care issues, text OKHEALTH to 51555.

