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Georgians for a Healthy Future Responds to DCH's Bid for Enhanced Pathways Funding Without Expanding Coverage

ATLANTA, GA — Georgians for a Healthy Future (GHF) today responded to Thursday's announcement from Georgia's Department of Community Health (DCH) that the agency will ask the federal government for permission to change how it funds Pathways to Coverage, the state's limited Medicaid program for Georgians earning up to 100% of the [federal poverty level](#) (FPL).

Because Georgia has not fully expanded Medicaid to cover Georgians earning up to 138% FPL, the federal government currently covers 66 percent of the cost of each Pathways enrollee.

DCH is requesting an increase to 90 percent, the same "enhanced" rate the federal government pays to states that have fully expanded Medicaid to low-income adults with incomes up to 138% FPL. DCH is asking for that funding boost without increasing Pathways' income eligibility.

To make this request, DCH must formally amend Georgia's Section 1115 waiver, the federal approval that allows Georgia to run Pathways with its own custom rules, including current work requirements, instead of following standard Medicaid rules.

"Every Georgian deserves access to health coverage, and every additional person who gains it is meaningful, even within a program as flawed as Pathways," said Laura Colbert, Executive Director of Georgians for a Healthy Future. "While the federal requirements do not eliminate the inherent problems with work reporting requirements, the shift away from Pathways' current structure to the federal version is an opportunity for more Georgians to gain coverage, including family caregivers, adults with serious chronic illnesses like cancer or mental illnesses, and veterans with a total disability rating."

Laura Colbert, Executive Director, Georgians for a Healthy Future

Pathways currently requires enrollees to document at least 80 hours per month of work or another qualifying activity and covers [fewer than 20,000 Georgians](#). Starting January 1, 2027, Georgia must align its work requirements with new nationwide standards under H.R. 1, the federal budget law passed last year that imposes Medicaid work requirements across the country. The new federal rules will include more exemptions than Georgia's current program, and DCH estimates this could increase Pathways enrollment to 120,000 Georgians.

The State's Proposal Lacks Key Information

DCH's announcement and waiver proposal do not include the methodology behind its enrollment or cost projections, nor has the agency said whether it explored other ways to fund the program at higher enrollment levels before requesting a better federal funding deal.

"Without this information, the public can't meaningfully evaluate this proposal, and the federal government can't make an informed decision either," Colbert said. "Georgians deserve transparency from their state government on decisions this consequential, and right now, DCH hasn't provided it."

Laura Colbert, Executive Director, Georgians for a Healthy Future

Coverage Should Not Be Used As Leverage

DCH has also suggested that Pathways could end entirely if the waiver amendment is denied, a scenario that would put health coverage for thousands of Georgians with low incomes at risk.

"More than 18,000 Georgians could lose the only health coverage available to them, not because of anything they did, but because state leaders are using their coverage as leverage in a funding dispute with Washington. Further, thousands more Georgians would no longer have the opportunity to gain coverage if the program no longer exists," Colbert said. "Whatever happens with this request, Georgia should not be threatening to take health coverage away from the people who depend on it."

Laura Colbert, Executive Director, Georgians for a Healthy Future

Precedent Suggests the Request Is Unlikely to Succeed

The Affordable Care Act ties the enhanced 90 percent federal match to states covering "newly eligible" adults, a standard that applies only to states that have expanded Medicaid to adults with incomes up to 138% FPL. Every state that has previously sought this enhanced match without meeting that income threshold, including Wisconsin, Utah, and Georgia itself in its original 2019 Pathways application, has been denied by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), including under the prior Trump administration. CMS guidance has consistently held that partial expansions like Pathways do not qualify for the enhanced rate.

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About Georgians for a Healthy Future

Georgians for a Healthy Future collaborates with communities and partners to lead policy change that advances health equity for all Georgians. Our vision is of a day in which all Georgians have equitable opportunities to achieve their highest level of health. We do this by delivering actionable health policy information to policymakers and advocates; providing resources to help consumers become strong advocates, and elevating the consumer experience to inform policy change. Read more at healthyfuturega.org.

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