

Senate Republican Health Bill Would Harm New Mexico's Tribal Communities

Written by By Sharon Kaye Communications Director NM Voices For Children
Friday, 14 July 2017 02:42



Report shows a 232 percent increase in Native uninsurance under Senate bill

ALBUQUERQUE—By slashing Medicaid and making marketplace coverage unaffordable, the U.S. Senate Republican health bill would have devastating consequences for New Mexico's American Indians. The uninsured rate among Native Americans in New Mexico would jump an estimated 232 percent under the bill, according to a new report from the Washington, DC-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

"The Senate Republican health bill would be devastating to Native American people living in New Mexico," said James Jimenez, executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children. "Our tribal communities are the cultural backbone of our state and have proven their resiliency despite centuries of challenges. These communities already face significant barriers to getting health care, despite centuries-old treaties and promises. A bill that makes things worse is unacceptable."

The Senate bill would:

effectively end the Affordable Care Act's expansion of Medicaid to adults, through which 45,600 of New Mexico's American Indians gained coverage;

dramatically cap and cut Medicaid, likely forcing states to cut eligibility, benefits, and provider rates. An exemption in the bill makes it appear that American Indians would be unaffected by this change, but as these cuts would apply to New Mexico's entire Medicaid program it's unlikely that any group will be safe; and

Senate Republican Health Bill Would Harm New Mexico's Tribal Communities

Written by By Sharon Kaye Communications Director NM Voices For Children
Friday, 14 July 2017 02:42

eliminate subsidies, known as cost-sharing reductions, that help low-income New Mexicans, including 45,600 American Indians, afford out-of-pocket health costs like copays and deductibles.

The Senate bill would not only affect coverage for New Mexico's American Indians, but also would weaken Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal facilities, for which Medicaid is a key source of financing. The bill's Medicaid cuts would take needed revenue from IHS and Tribal facilities, forcing them to ration care, as they did before the Affordable Care Act.

American Indians and Alaska Natives face persistent health disparities, including a high uninsurance rate, barriers to accessing care, and significant physical and mental health needs. Like many other groups, Native Americans have benefited greatly from the Affordable Care Act's coverage expansions. Nationally, the uninsured rate among American Indians and Alaska Natives has fallen by more than a quarter, from 29 percent in 2010 to 21 percent in 2015. The Senate Republican health bill would reverse these gains.

"There are many opportunities for Congress to improve our health care system," said Jimenez. "But this bill can't be fixed: the Senate needs to start over and take a different, bipartisan approach."

***By Sharon Kaye
Communications Director
NM Voices For Children***