

MEDICAID PROTECTS TRIBAL COMMUNITY HEALTH

POSITION STATEMENT

The 21 Member Tribes of the Inter Tribal Association of Arizona (ITAA) support the protection of Medicaid and urge Congress to avoid any programmatic changes that would impact American Indian communities. Medicaid is a vital program essential for the health and well-being of American Indian communities, particularly in rural areas where access to healthcare is already fraught with many challenges.

KEY POINTS

 In Arizona, **many children in rural areas are covered by Medicaid** and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Apache County, Arizona, is among the top 20 counties in the country with the highest number of children covered by Medicaid/CHIP.

 **Essential Funding for Health Services:** Medicaid funding is essential for individuals who cannot obtain third-party health coverage, allowing them to access a range of services, including referred specialty care.

 **Medicaid cuts could put rural Tribal communities at significant risk.** Such changes may lead to workforce shortages, reduced operating hours, and staff layoffs. Cuts could result in elimination of critical care programs such as mental health care, maternal and child health programs, and other specialty services.



BACKGROUND

Medicaid plays a crucial role in supporting Tribes in rural areas by providing comprehensive healthcare coverage to individuals who might otherwise be unable to afford it. In these regions, families and individuals often face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, including lower incomes, higher rates of disabilities, and acute provider shortages. Medicaid funding is essential for maintaining stability within the Indian health system, allowing individuals to access a range of services, including referred specialty care. This support is particularly important for vulnerable populations, such as children and seniors, who rely heavily on Medicaid for their healthcare needs.

Cuts to Medicaid would have devastating effects on rural Tribal communities. It is imperative that Congress recognizes the profound impact that Medicaid has on the health and well-being of Native American communities, takes action to ensure the continuation and strengthening of this vital program, and adheres to the federal government's legal and moral trust responsibility to ensure the health and well-being of all federally recognized Indian Tribes and their people.

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Position Statement

The 21 Member Tribes of the Inter Tribal Association of Arizona (ITAA) support the protection of Medicaid and urge Congress to avoid any programmatic changes that would impact American Indian communities. Medicaid is a vital program essential for the health and well-being of American Indian communities, particularly in rural areas where access to healthcare is already fraught with many challenges.

Furthermore, Medicaid is part of the federal government's legal and moral trust responsibility to federally recognized Indian Tribes (*Seminole Nation v. United States*, 1942). This responsibility requires the protection of Tribal lands, resources, and treaty rights, as well as fulfilling obligations outlined in federal law. Medicaid is a tool for delivering a part of that trust responsibility, which includes ensuring the health and well-being of all federally recognized Indian Tribes and their people.

Key Points

- **Challenges in Rural Areas.** Rural areas face greater challenges, including lower incomes, higher rates of disabilities, acute provider shortages, and additional barriers like lack of transportation and internet connectivity, which make it harder to access health care services.
- **Medicaid's Role for Vulnerable Seniors.** Medicaid provides essential financial assistance for cost-sharing and wraparound benefits for the most vulnerable seniors and serves as the primary payer for long-term care.
- **Coverage for Children and Non-Elderly Adults.** In Arizona, many children in rural areas are covered by Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Apache County, located in Arizona, is among the top 20 counties in the country with the highest number of children covered by Medicaid/CHIP.
 - Nationally, 48.7% of Native American children up to age 19 rely on Medicaid for healthcare coverage. For many Indian health facilities, Medicaid accounts for 30-60% of total funding. According to the American Community Survey in 2023, approximately 31% of American Indian and Alaska Natives were enrolled in Medicaid, compared to 20% for the general population.
- **Essential Funding for Health Services.** Medicaid funding is essential for individuals who cannot obtain third-party health coverage, allowing them to access a range of services, including referred specialty care. This support is crucial for maintaining stability within the Indian health system.
- **Risks of Medicaid Cuts.** Medicaid cuts could put rural Tribal communities at significant risk. In Indian Country, such changes may lead to workforce shortages at Indian health facilities, reduced operating hours, and staff layoffs. Additionally, they cuts could result in elimination of critical care programs and medical services, including mental health care, maternal and child health programs, and other specialty services.
- **Urban Indian Organization (UIO).** UIOs, established under the Indian Healthcare Improvement Act, serve more than 500 tribes across 22 states. Medicaid reimbursements

are essential for providing care to American Indian and Alaska Native populations living in metro areas. As of 2022, eight out of the ten areas with the highest number of American Indian and Alaska Native Medicaid enrollees were served by a UIO.

Background

Medicaid plays a crucial role in supporting Tribes in rural areas by providing comprehensive healthcare coverage to individuals who might otherwise be unable to afford it. In these regions, families and individuals often face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, including lower incomes, higher rates of disabilities, and acute provider shortages. Medicaid funding is essential for maintaining stability within the Indian health system, allowing individuals to access a range of services, including referred specialty care. This support is particularly important for vulnerable populations, such as children and seniors, who rely heavily on Medicaid for their healthcare needs.

Cuts to Medicaid would have devastating effects on rural Tribal communities, leading to workforce shortages, reduced operating hours, staff layoffs, and the elimination of critical care programs and medical services. It is imperative that Congress recognizes the profound impact that Medicaid has on the health and well-being of Native American communities, takes action to ensure the continuation and strengthening of this vital program, and adheres to the federal government's legal and moral trust responsibility to ensure the health and well-being of all federally recognized Indian Tribes and their people.