

From the Daily Journal archives

Day of Action highlights importance of Medicaid

Around 72M low-income, disabled people currently rely on the health care program

By Holly Rusch, Daily Journal staff
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Bay Area congressional leaders, activists and medical staff gathered in San Francisco Tuesday to speak out against expected cuts to Medicaid, part of a national day of action to highlight the importance of the government-funded health care program that serves around 72 million Americans.

A Republican-led budget resolution, passed by the House in a razor-thin margin, directs the House Energy and Commerce Committee — which oversees highly popular health care programs like Medicare and Medicaid — to make \$880 billion in cuts.

Though the directive doesn’t specify the cuts be made directly to Medicaid, a program President Donald Trump previously promised to keep alive, Democrats argued that the amount of money on the chopping block makes major health care losses imminent.

“What I look at is, what are they doing?” U.S. Sen. Adam Schiff said. “When they passed a budget that requires \$880 billion to come out of a particular pot of money, and there’s no way you can find anywhere near that without decimating Medicaid, it’s clear what they’re doing.”

In the 15th congressional district — comprising mostly of San Mateo County — cuts to Medicaid could leave some 43,000 individuals without health care, San Mateo County Supervisor Jackie Speier said previously.

In San Francisco, 100,000 people, including 21,000 children, utilize Medicaid, Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, D-San Francisco, said. When asked to specify what portion of Medicaid would be affected by the \$880 billion in cuts, Pelosi responded crisply.

“A devastating portion. It’s life and death,” she said.

U.S. Rep. Kevin Mullin, D-South San Francisco, was recently hospitalized for 10 days following complications from a routine knee surgery. He left the hospital and flew to D.C. to vote against the budget legislation, he said, citing the importance of accessible health care for all Americans.

“The truth is none of us know when we will have the need for urgent medical care. I was so very fortunate to have health insurance, but I can’t even imagine what my family would be facing right now in unexpected medical costs if we hadn’t,” he said. “It is utterly shameful that the Trump administration and Republicans want to strip away health care and Medicaid from millions of Americans just so they can fund a tax cut for billionaires.”

Democrats have been rocked by infighting about the path forward against the Trump agenda since his reelection. That came to a head last week, when Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer voted for a six-month Republican funding bill to avoid government shutdown.

The decision drew ire from members of the Democratic Party, who felt the decision undermined what little leverage they retained in the fight for a budget with adequate funding for social-net programs like Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security, among other issues. Pelosi retains confidence in Schumer to lead Senate democrats, she affirmed during the press conference, but expressed concern around the recent outcome.

“I myself, don’t just give away anything for nothing, and I think that’s what happened the other day,” she said. “We could have, in my view, perhaps gotten them to agree to a third way, which was a bipartisan [continuing resolution] for two weeks to four weeks, in which we could have had bipartisan legislation to go forward.”

Cuts to Medicaid — known as Medi-Cal in California — could lead to “a cascading set of closures of hospitals and clinics” in the state, Schiff warned. Without federal funding for health care programs, states would have to make tough choices around how those programs functioned, including paying doctors, hospitals and nursing homes less for care, the New York Times reported.

Dr. Josh Adler, UC San Francisco chief medical officer, lamented the negative impacts to patients that Medicaid cuts could cause. Roughly 70% of UCSF inpatient care goes to patients using public health care, Adler said.

“I’ve seen firsthand the profound positive impact that Medicaid coverage has on our patients and our community, and simultaneously know the negative impact that would occur by eliminating that coverage,” he said. “Significant cuts to Medicaid would undermine the entire health care system in California and weaken its capacity to provide care to all patients.”

U.S. Rep. Mike Thompson, D-St. Helena, defended California’s decision to expand Medi-Cal to all eligible undocumented adults, beginning 2024.

“If your neighbor is undocumented and has a communicable disease and your kids get it and die, it doesn’t stop — the health care issues don’t stop at the property line,” he said. “And it’s the same thing, someone who was injured needs to get help. They should get help.”

Thompson, who represents a rural district, pointed to the fact that many Californians in Republican districts could also lose health insurance.

“We have a colleague, a Republican colleague who voted for this stuff, who has the biggest Medicaid population in the country,” he said. “He needs to hear from his constituents. Every red district needs to speak up. This is an absolute tragedy.”

Publicly funded health care is fundamentally integral for millions of Americans, said Sascha Bittner — San Francisco Disability and Aging Sacha Bittner — a quadriplegic who has been a UCSF patient.

“For those who profess to be pro life, please note that my life ... did not end when I left the womb,” she said. “There are disabled, children, elderly and other vulnerable people like me who depend on Medicaid, and the Republican plan to gut this crucial support is an attack on our very lives.”

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