

Basic Needs

Nothing healthy about it: Proposal would limit Ohioans' access to Medicaid

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Ohio House Representative Jim Butler is promoting a proposal that will apply to a million Medicaid enrollees. He's calling it the "Healthy Ohio Plan" (HOP), even though it is likely to make Ohioans less healthy.

HOP would require Ohio to ask the federal government to waive rules so as to charge "premiums" (monthly payments) for non-elderly adults enrolled in a "Plus" plan for Medicaid services and offer a "Basic" plan with fewer services for those who can't pay.

Premiums would start at a minimum of \$1 for those earning less than \$600 a year and rise, based on 2% of annual income, to \$20 per month. Those who pay regularly will stay in the HOP Plus plan. Those who can't would be put into the HOP Basic plan.

HOP Plus may or may not offer services provided today. But those who miss two premium payments in a row (60 days) or fail to submit required paperwork lose access to the Plus plan for 12 months and are dropped down to the Basic plan.

HOP Basic would offer fewer services than the Plus plan and fewer than services Medicaid provides today. The language specifies that the Basic plan must be inferior to Plus. People could lose mental health treatment, oxygen, ambulance service, prescription drug and dental coverage, and more.

Exemptions: The only exemptions are for people who are wards of the state, pregnant, have cancer or severe and persistent mental illness, or are making 'satisfactory progress' in drug/alcohol addiction treatment.

The HOP is based on Indiana's Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP). Evaluations found that between February of 2015 and November of 2016, almost 60,000 eligible people either dropped out of Medicaid altogether or never enrolled because they missed the first or a subsequent payment. Almost half of those who did enroll, 287,000 people, lost important medical services as they were dropped into the Basic plan for failure to pay premiums.

Representative Butler's HOP appeared briefly in the final version of the House budget for 2020-21, House Bill 166, but was removed before the final vote. There's danger it may reappear later in the budget process or in a stand-alone bill. Legislators should reject it.