

## WV Medicaid Recipients Don't Understand Program, Survey Says

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 27 August 2008 00:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 03 September 2008 01:56

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[Charleston Gazette](#) August 27, 2008 W.Va. Medicaid recipients don't understand program, survey says  
West Virginians covered by Medicaid don't understand recent program changes, leaving thousands of low-income children and families without access to critical medical care, according to a survey released Tuesday.

By

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Staff writer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - West Virginians covered by Medicaid don't understand recent program changes, leaving thousands of low-income children and families without access to critical medical care, according to a survey released Tuesday.

The Direct Action Welfare Group, a statewide organization of people on public assistance, said the state's Medicaid office has mismanaged the program - called Mountain Health Choices - and failed to educate recipients.

Two-thirds of West Virginians on Medicaid said they didn't receive a letter from the state, notifying them that their benefits had changed, according to the survey.

The welfare group wants the program suspended until the state fixes the problem.

"They aren't getting the information they need to make informed choices," said Eveyln Dortch, director of the Direct Action Welfare Group. "I just simply don't think people understand it. Mountain Health Choices is yet another social experiment on the poor done without any input on the people most affected by the program."

Medicaid officials said Tuesday they weren't given a copy of the survey results.

"We can't dispute findings of a study we haven't seen," said Medicaid spokeswoman Shannon Landrum, adding that West Virginia University researchers plan to conduct a scientific survey on the new program's implementation in the coming months.

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The revamped Medicaid program, which started in three counties in May 2006 and went statewide a year later, offers low-income families the choice of two plans - a bare-bones "basic" and an "enhanced."

The enhanced plan requires Medicaid recipients to meet with a doctor and sign a "personal responsibility" agreement to improve their health. In exchange, they receive expanded services, such as smoking cessation, weight management and nutrition classes.

The basic plan has fewer benefits than traditional Medicaid. It limits people to four prescription drugs a month, though some lifesaving drugs are exempt.

The welfare advocacy group believes that Medicaid recipients - 80 percent are children - are being automatically bumped to the basic package because they don't understand how to enroll in the enhanced plan.

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By last month, only 7 percent of adults and 8 percent of children receiving Medicaid across the state - about 12,000 people - had enrolled in the program's enhanced plan.

"People are being put in basic without even knowing it," Dortch said. "They say, 'What's this mean, basic?' They don't have a clue."

The survey showed that nearly 60 percent of Medicaid recipients didn't know whether they were signed up for the basic or enhanced plan. Nearly 50 percent weren't sure which plan their children were in.

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Two recent national reports - one from Georgetown University and another from a health-care advocacy organization called Families USA - have sharply criticized West Virginia's redesigned Medicaid program, saying it's failing poor families and children.

The Direct Action Welfare Group is the first to survey Medicaid recipients about the state's new program. About 350 beneficiaries from 20 counties responded. The majority were from Raleigh, Fayette and Summers counties.

The welfare advocacy group also surveyed physician offices and behavioral health centers. One of every three health-care providers said they hadn't received information about Mountain Health Choices.

The welfare group said Medicaid recipients who sign up for the enhanced plan must wait two to three months before they receive expanded coverage.

The organization is distributing a 15-page information packet - prepared by the American Friends Service Committee and funded by the West Virginia Council of Churches - to Medicaid recipients about the Medicaid program options.

"We're scrambling to give them the information the [state Medicaid office] should be giving them," said Sam Hickman, director of the National Association of Social Workers West Virginia chapter.

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