

# Florida Senate's Proposed Cuts to Vision, Hearing, Podiatric, and Chiropractic Medicaid Services Would Disproportionately Hurt Seniors, People with Disabilities, and the State Budget

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## **What is the Senate proposing to cut?**

The Senate's proposed budget (SPB 2500) and health conforming bill (SPB 2518) include language that would eliminate Medicaid coverage for vision, optometric, hearing, podiatric, and chiropractic services provided to adults.

## **Who would be impacted?**

Medicaid provides coverage for these services for adults with very low income. Seniors and people with disabilities would be disproportionately hurt.

## **How would this cut to services hurt seniors and people with disabilities?**

Lack of access to these medically necessary services can pose serious risks for overall health, unnecessarily push people into more costly institutional care, and significantly diminish quality of life. Untreated hearing or vision loss can lead to a variety of physical and mental health problems, including increased risk of dementia, reduced cognitive function, falls, limited mobility, hospitalizations, depression, and increased social isolation.<sup>1</sup>

When Arizona eliminated Medicaid coverage for podiatry services, patients had worse outcomes and the state saw increased costs for patients with diabetic foot infections. One study concluded that for each \$1 of Medicaid program "savings" the state anticipated from the elimination of podiatric services, care costs actually increased by \$44 per patient.<sup>2</sup> Treatment for lower back pain initiated by a chiropractor rather than an M.D. was associated with lower costs<sup>3</sup> and lower or less frequent doses of opioids<sup>4</sup>.

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## **How would this cut hurt the state budget and Florida taxpayers?**

Through federal COVID-relief, Florida is currently receiving an "enhanced federal match" for its Medicaid program. Congress appropriated these extra funds because federal lawmakers recognize that states face additional costs due to the public health emergency and that it is critically important for people to have coverage during this unprecedented pandemic.<sup>5</sup>

However, receipt of these funds is contingent on the state not making any cuts to Medicaid eligibility or services.<sup>6</sup> In other words, if Florida goes forward with this cut, the state would be required to forego millions of extra federal dollars. Notably, at the end of the last fiscal year, Florida had a Medicaid general revenue surplus of \$343 million due to receipt of the enhanced federal match. It is projected that the additional federal relief funding will be available at least through the end of 2021. But even when the additional federal funding ends, it would not make sense for the state to eliminate this coverage. This is coverage that saves money in

the long run by helping people stay in their homes and local communities rather than in more costly institutional settings.

**For more info:** Contact Anne Swerlick, senior policy analyst & attorney at Florida Policy Institute, [swerlick@floridapolicy.org](mailto:swerlick@floridapolicy.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Katch and Paul N. Van de Water, “Medicaid and Medicare Enrollees Need Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefits,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, December 8, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/medicaid-and-medicare-enrollees-need-dental-vision-and-hearing-benefits>.

<sup>2</sup> American Podiatric Medical Association, “The Helping Ensure Life- and Limb-Saving Access to Podiatric Physicians (HELLPP) Act, Frequently Asked Questions,” <https://www.apma.org/files/FAQHELLPPActFINAL050115.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Richard L Liliedahl *et al.*, “Cost of care for common back pain conditions initiated with chiropractic doctor vs medical doctor/doctor of osteopathy as first physician: experience of one Tennessee-based general health insurer,” *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics*, Vol. 33, No. 9, Nov-Dec 2010, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21109053/>.

<sup>4</sup> James M. Whedon *et al.*, “Association Between Utilization of Chiropractic Services for Treatment of Low-Back Pain and Use of Prescription Opioids,” *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, Vol. 24, No. 6, June 2018, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29470104/>.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Solomon, Jennifer Wagner and Aviva Aron-Dine, “Medicaid Protections in Families First Act Critical to Protecting Health Coverage,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, April 17, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/medicaid-protections-in-families-first-act-critical-to-protecting-health-coverage>

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Eichner *et al.*, “The Maintenance of Effort Provision Protects Services,” National Health Law Program, August 11, 2020, <https://healthlaw.org/resource/the-maintenance-of-effort-provision-protects-services/>.