

Put People First! Pennsylvania

Background and template for letters to the editor about Healthy PA

Letter-to-the-Editor Tips

Please note: it is important to write your own letter, and not copy and paste talking points without adding your own thoughts. Newspaper editors will likely not publish letters that appear to be form letters.

Length

Your letter should be short and to the point. Newspapers have limited space, and letters that are more too long might not be considered for publication, so aim for no more than 150-200 words. Shorter is almost always better.

Structure

One good way of structuring your letter is: *problem, solution, call to action*. Describe the **problem**; propose a **solution**, and then call the reader to **take action**.

Making the Issue Local

Editors often discard letters they think do not bring a local focus, so describing how the healthcare crisis causes problems for people in the local area will greatly increase the likelihood of your letter running in the paper.

Engage in a Conversation

Monitor how your paper reports healthcare issues and write letters regularly in response to their reporting. Making reference to a specific article in your paper increases the likelihood of your letter being published. But don't overdo it: there's no need to repeat someone else's arguments.

Sample Letters to the Editor on Governor Corbett's Medicaid Proposal

1) Tell your healthcare story

Why do we treat healthcare as a commodity sold to those who can afford it? It is one of our most basic human needs. When I/someone I know needed... _____

[Insert one sentence explaining how you or a loved one needed medical care but couldn't get the care you needed, and what kept you from getting the care. For example, my mother needed treatment for diabetes, but the deductible on her insurance was so high she delayed going to the doctor.]

We all have a human right to healthcare. Governor Corbett has to make sure everyone in Pennsylvania can get the care they need. It's our right, and it's the right thing to do.

– Name, City/Town

2) Healthcare is a matter of basic dignity

I was shocked to hear that Governor Corbett has submitted a proposal to Washington requesting 24 exemptions (twenty-four!) from federal Medicaid rules that protect people's human right to health care. Because Gov. Corbett refuses to simply expand Medicaid to include all people living in poverty, his proposal will end up blocking people who can't afford to pay insurance premiums or co-pays from getting access to health care. We all need health care, regardless of how much money we make, and we all have a right to get it. It's a matter of basic dignity. That's why I'm supporting Put People First! PA to call on our state to provide healthcare as a public good, not a commodity. Washington is accepting comments on the proposal through April 10. Visit <http://tinyurl.com/PaMedicaid> to submit yours.

– Name, City/Town

3) We need health care as a public good, not for private profits

It looks like Governor Corbett is out to undermine our health, and he's starting with poor people first. He is asking the U.S. Secretary of Health & Human Services for permission to take public Medicaid money and hand it over to insurance companies. Instead of expanding Medicaid, our public health program for people living in poverty, he wants to subsidize private insurance policies. This would take money out of community clinics and local hospitals and away from the people who most need it. Why is the Governor trying to privatize Medicaid? Having private insurance doesn't guarantee care: deductibles, co-pays and other out-of-pocket costs make care unaffordable for many of us. Let's get real. Private insurance doesn't work. We need to put people ahead of profits and get universal, publicly financed health care in Pennsylvania. The first step is to stop the Governor's privatization proposal. Google "private Medicaid coverage public comment" and submit a comment to medicaid.gov.

– Name, City/Town

4) Medicaid is about health care, not work

Governor Corbett seems to be confused. He wants to turn Medicaid into an employment program. It's simple, so let me explain it to you, Governor: Medicaid is about healthcare, not work. It doesn't matter whether we're employed full time, working at home, between jobs, or unable to work at all. Healthcare is a basic human need and a universal human right. We all have a right to get the health care we need, and a responsibility to ensure that everyone else can do the same. We need to deliver healthcare to those who need it, not just to those who have money and jobs. I encourage readers to oppose Gov. Corbett's Medicaid proposal and to submit a comment to the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services at <http://tinyurl.com/PaMedicaid> by the April 10 deadline.

– Name, City/Town

Talking points about Healthcare Is a Human Right:

- Healthcare is a human right. Everyone has human rights by virtue of being human. Everyone has the right to get the healthcare they need when they need it. It should be a public good, like the fire department. No one should have to go without healthcare because they cannot pay for it. No one should have to worry about whether they can pay premiums, deductibles and co-payments. As a public good, our healthcare system should serve the people's needs and not the profit-making interests of the private insurance and pharmaceutical industry.
- In our market-based healthcare system, healthcare is sold as a commodity to those who can pay for it. This creates huge barriers to getting the care we need, and it makes us suffer from preventable health problems. It also means we waste a lot of money on the administration and profiteering of insurance plans and over-priced medicines. Private companies act as middlemen that take a cut, and our health suffers as a result. Unfortunately, Obamacare does not change that: healthcare will continue to be a commodity. We'll be forced to buy an insurance product that we may not be able to use because of high deductibles and co-pays. This means we are denied our right to healthcare. Instead of letting insurance companies profit off of our sickness and health, we need a universal, publicly financed health care system with the costs and benefits shared equitably.
- We must rely upon our tradition of caring for each other to keep our communities healthy. It is this tradition of caring for one another that has sparked our treatment of education and fire and emergency services as public goods. No one whose house is on fire can put it out alone: we have fire departments to do that and to ensure the safety of the surrounding homes. Similarly, the health of our population is a goal we all share and we can only achieve together. Healthcare should be a public good that is publicly financed and administered. It must be accountable to the people of the communities it serves, not to those seeking to profit from our illnesses.
- Every other industrialized country in the world provides universal care for its people, while spending less than half of what we spend in the U.S. They also have much lower infant mortality and higher life expectancy rates, along with better health outcomes more generally. Why are these other countries successful when we are not? It is because they treat healthcare as a public good and a human right. We need to do the same here. We need universal healthcare.
- We need to join together in our communities to demand healthcare as a human right. We can only overcome the power and money of the healthcare industry if we organize ourselves and build a strong movement. Our numbers can be more powerful than their money – we just need to come together! I encourage everyone to talk to neighbors and co-workers about the human right to healthcare. We need a universal healthcare system in which everyone gets the care they need, and contributes what they can.

Key facts about Medicaid and Governor Corbett's proposal:

- **What is Medicaid?** Medicaid is a public health care program for low-income people across the United States. Along with Medicare and programs for federal employees,

veterans, and American Indians, Medicaid and its sister program CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) have long provided access to health care for low-income children, pregnant women, and families. Some states include all low-income people in this program, and many others have now expanded Medicaid as part of the Affordable Care Act, which pays for such an expansion with federal money, but Pennsylvania has not. An estimated 281,000 uninsured low-income adults are being left without health care because Governor Corbett has not yet expanded Medicaid¹.

- **How has Medicaid been expanded under Obamacare?** Historically Medicaid only served low-income children and their parents (although some states went further and included all people in poverty), but under the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid was expanded to include all low-income people (defined as anyone earning less than 138% of the federal poverty line, which works out to about \$15,850 for a single adult). After a June 2012 Supreme Court decision allowed states to opt out of Medicaid expansion to childless adults, Governor Corbett decided not to expand the program, but he's now changed his tactic. He now says he wants to expand Medicaid, but he wants to do so by waiving 24 federal requirements that exist to protect people's right to health care, including taking rights away from people who are already enrolled.
- **What does Governor Corbett's proposal include?** Governor Corbett has submitted a proposal to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) requesting a waiver from federal Medicaid requirements that exist to protect people's right to health care. He is trying to get exemptions from twenty-four separate requirements, many of which are identical to requests made by Iowa that were explicitly rejected by HHS. Corbett is trying to use this proposal as a Trojan horse to sneak in proposals that would actually take away existing rights from people who are currently enrolled in Medicaid. The waivers he's requesting include:
 - **Premiums:** Instead of guaranteeing new Medicaid enrollees access to free and very low-cost care, Corbett's so-called "premium assistance" model would require all new enrollees to buy subsidized private insurance plans. People (all of whom would be below 150% of the poverty line, and therefore don't have much money) would have to pay premiums on these plans, and if they fail to pay their premiums, their care would be terminated and they would be locked out of reapplying for three months.
 - **Privatization:** Corbett's premiums proposal would take federal Medicaid money and use it to purchase private health insurance plans on Pennsylvania's new health exchange, essentially handing public money to for-profit insurance companies.
 - **Co-pays:** Corbett would increase co-pays for non-emergency visits to the emergency room above the legal limit, even though ERs are often people's only option for medical care, since many physicians do not accept Medicaid patients. This may leave people without access to needed care.
 - **Work search requirements:** Corbett wants to take Medicaid away from people who need it the most – those who can't find formal employment. He wants to get people to complete and document 12 "approved job training or employment-related activities" per month, an insulting and impossible task for many, especially

¹ <http://kff.org/health-reform/state-indicator/number-of-poor-uninsured-nonelderly-adults-in-the-aca-coverage-gap/?state=PA>

the sickest people most in need of health care. If anyone fails to document their job hunting, Corbett would terminate their health care and lock them out from reapplying for three months. He knows this is controversial, so he is proposing it as a voluntary pilot project, but this sets a dangerous precedent. No state has ever attached any work requirements to Medicaid, and we can't let Pennsylvania go this route.

- o **Eliminating non-emergency medical transportation:** Many people who are poor enough to qualify for Medicaid cannot afford a car, do not have access to quality health care in their communities, or are too ill to drive or take public transportation. Medicaid requires that medical transportation be made available to people, but Corbett wants to eliminate this requirement.
- o **Eliminating freedom of choice:** Corbett wants to take away women's access to family planning services and supplies.
- **Why is Governor Corbett allowed to do this?** Federal law (Section 1115 of the Social Security Act) gives the Secretary of Health and Human Services authority to approve experimental, pilot, or demonstration projects that promote the objectives of the Medicaid/CHIP. The purpose of the pilot projects is to demonstrate and evaluate policy approaches such as expanding eligibility to more people, expanding the services covered by Medicaid, or using innovative service delivery systems to improve care, increase efficiency, and reduce costs. Corbett seems to see this as a way to sneak in policy changes to undercut public health care programs.
- **What's happening now? What happens next?** The Department of Health and Human Services is accepting public comments until 6am on April 11. Comments can be submitted at <https://public.medicaid.gov/connect.ti/public.comments/view?objectId=1852995>. After that the Secretary of Health and Human Services will make a decision on the proposal.