



1905 Aldrich Street, Suite 210 | Austin, TX 78723
1-866-227-7443 | Fax: 512-469-6060
aarp.org/tx | txaarp@aarp.org | twitter: @aarptx
facebook.com/aarptexas

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor
State of Texas
Texas Capitol
1100 Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701

Dear Governor Abbott:

On behalf of all older Texans, including AARP's 2.3 million members in the state, I write to urge you to take immediate action to provide temporary Medicaid coverage to uninsured Texans living below the poverty level. Failure to address the lack of health insurance for millions of residents will put the health and economic security of all Texans at risk. Uninsured Texans, regardless of age, who may be infected with COVID-19 may avoid seeking care and risk spreading the virus. Uninsured older persons are particularly vulnerable to the disease and may not seek care, risking serious illness or death.

Texas has the highest number and percentage of uninsured adults in the nation, many of whom are janitors, child care teachers, restaurant workers and other low-wage adults whose wages and jobs are in jeopardy. Uninsured Texans have limited access to treatment services, which can be costly. They may avoid getting care because of the cost. In the wake of an infectious disease that threatens all Texans, accepting federal funds to offer insurance to low-wage workers is a necessary action to protect Texans' health and safety.

Health coverage will encourage timely testing for COVID-19, provide much-needed treatment, and provide financial stability to families struggling with lost earnings.

Our health care system is also struggling. Coverage will provide hospitals and other health care providers with the certainty that they will be reimbursed for the care they provide.

While AARP has, for some time, stood in support of expansion of Medicaid coverage, helping Texans obtain coverage now, during this crisis, illustrates that access to health care is a critical need.



As such, there is precedent for states seeking and CMS approval of temporary Medicaid coverage using Section 1115 waiver authority. Section 1115 waiver authority allows the Secretary of HHS to test new approaches in Medicaid not otherwise allowed under current law, provided the demonstrations meet the objectives of the program. During past emergencies, states obtained Section 1115 waivers to expedite access to coverage and health care services for a variety of affected individuals.

New York used Section 1115 to provide four months of Medicaid coverage immediately after 9/11 using a simplified expedited application process. After Hurricane Katrina, states were offered the option to provide up to five months of Medicaid or CHIP coverage to certain evacuees. In 2016, Michigan received a waiver to expand Medicaid and CHIP eligibility for children and pregnant women affected by the Flint water crisis. As you know, Texas used this authority after Hurricane Harvey to allow Medicaid clients to receive services beyond their renewal period, suspended certain eligibility verification requirements, and eliminated cost sharing for the waiver period.

As Texas seeks to do all it can to protect the public's health during this pandemic, ensuring that all Texans have access to health care is paramount. AARP urges you to take the necessary steps to temporarily expand Medicaid to those living below the poverty level using a presumptive eligibility process. Such an approach will help otherwise uninsured Texans get the care they need and help providers to be paid for the care they provide.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this issue. If you have questions, please contact me at 832-325-2232.



Tina Tran,
State Director