

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

JANUARY 15, 2025

Contact: Hillarie Hagen

208-918-9062 : hhagen@idahovoices.org



**Idaho's Rural Children, Adults Disproportionately Rely on Medicaid/CHIP
*Advocates call on State and Congressional lawmakers to reject Medicaid cuts***

A new report from the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families shows how critical Medicaid is for rural America. Nationwide, non-elderly adults and children in rural areas and small towns are more likely than those living in metro areas to rely on Medicaid/CHIP for their health insurance.

This finding holds true in Idaho. In Idaho's urban areas, 33.1% of children are enrolled in Medicaid/CHIP for health coverage. In rural Idaho, 36.8% of children are enrolled.

Among adults younger than 65, about 17% of those in Idaho's small towns and rural areas get their coverage through Medicaid, compared to about 15.7% in metro areas.

This report comes as some of Idaho's legislative leaders are [threatening to repeal Medicaid expansion](#) even though it saves Idaho tax dollars, while some [Congressional leaders have put Medicaid cuts and other threats to healthcare coverage](#) at the top of their agenda to pay for tax cuts.

"It is alarming to hear of the latest threats to Medicaid as we learn more about Medicaid's role in keeping Idahoans healthy and productive, and how popular Medicaid is among Idaho voters," said Hillarie Hagen, senior policy associate at Idaho Voices for Children. "Cutting people from our already restrictive eligibility requirements would cause our uninsured rates to skyrocket with rural Idaho facing the greatest harm. As Idahoans face a rising cost of living, families may be forced to forego healthcare altogether until it becomes an emergency, resulting in high medical debt and risk of bankruptcy."

These findings are particularly salient for Idaho because a significant portion of our population is rural. Nationwide, about 14% of people live in small towns and rural areas. In Idaho, 27% of the population lives in small towns/rural areas.

"There is an impact to rural communities that often gets overlooked. When people who are injured or sick need access to medical care without the resources to pay for that care, they often incur large medical debt. This stifles the economic growth in rural communities. If you are struggling with medical debt, you do not have the resources to invest in a new business, purchase goods or invest in other activities that feed the financial health of rural communities," said Dr. Kelly McGrath, a family medicine physician practicing in Orofino. "Most of the patients I see on Medicaid are hard-working, caring citizens who have experienced difficult medical

conditions or just are living through challenging financial experiences. Just last week, I had a patient tell me that ‘without Medicaid, I would be dead.’ She is right. This year she had a critical illness and was trying not to access ER care but remembered that she had coverage, so she did. She spent several days in an ICU and needed surgery, but she survived and is now thriving. Medicaid clearly saves lives.”

Idaho’s non-metro counties are home to many Native Americans living on reservations or Tribal Lands, where health care access is also a challenge.

“Idaho Medicaid must continue to be available for Tribal Communities to address the unique healthcare challenges we face. Proposed Medicaid cuts threaten prevention efforts, like cancer screenings and prenatal care, that detect health issues early. Cuts to Medicaid can also put expensive treatments like chemotherapy out of reach and can even lead to preventable deaths due to care being delayed or inaccessible,” said Travis Martin, Tribal Health Director for the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes.

“If lawmakers go through with the sweeping Medicaid cuts they’re proposing, we all lose – but our rural areas have even more at stake. We call on all Idaho lawmakers to reject these Medicaid cuts and recognize the important role it plays in health care access for all Idahoans,” said Hagen.

The report uses data from the Census Bureau’s 2023 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (ACS PUMS). To view Idaho data, [click here](#).

The full report, along with interactive maps featuring a county-level breakdown of Medicaid coverage, can be found here: <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2025/01/15/medicaids-role-in-small-towns-and-rural-areas/>.

###

Idaho Supports Medicaid is a network of healthcare stakeholders, providers, community organizations, and individual advocates working to keep Medicaid strong so Idahoans can get the care they need for children to grow and develop, parents to participate in the workforce and provide for their families, and to promote healthy communities. Idaho Supports Medicaid is a project of Idaho Voices for Children.