



West Virginians for Affordable Health Care
Consumer Voices for Health Care

March 13, 2020

Statement of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care

The Coronavirus or COVID-19 Threat

Never Has Universal Affordable Health Coverage and Care Been More Critical

West Virginia, the United States, and the world are facing a serious new health threat – the Coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic. While we know this new virus can have serious or deadly symptoms, can be transmitted easily, and has a higher death rate than the flu has averaged over past years, there is still much uncertainty about this pandemic. At this time, experts have reported that older people are at higher risk of serious or deadly symptoms. In addition, people with diabetes, heart, lung or immune health issues are at higher risk of death.

As a nation, we are being called on to respond seriously to this threat. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is a valuable source of [reliable information about COVID-19](#). The situation is in flux and we all must take it upon ourselves to stay updated on the facts and take calm, responsible actions to protect our families and loved ones as well as our communities.

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care is dedicated to universal health care access and health care equity among all West Virginians. The Affordable Care Act and Medicaid program are critical to our state and national [response to COVID-19](#). No public health strategies can be successful if many of us are outside the health care system – whether uninsured or underinsured and unable to afford the health care they need. *Never has the necessity of universal affordable health coverage and care been more critically important to our nation.*

We are fortunate to live in state that decided to expand Medicaid coverage to more low-income adults – an option made available to states through the Affordable Care Act or ObamaCare. Further, the Affordable Care Act's premium subsidies help West Virginians who are not eligible for Medicaid afford quality private health insurance. In fact, the number of uninsured West Virginia adults (age 18 to 64) declined 29% to 9% under the Affordable Care Act – the largest decline of any state.

Now is not the time to strike down the gains made under the Affordable Care Act in the courts. Now is not the time to reduce Medicaid federal funding to the states. Rather, now is the time to continue to look forward to how we can build towards universal health care coverage.

We call on our political leaders to set aside partisanship and to take [positive action](#) to promote containment of COVID-19 and to help our West Virginia

families cope with the virus' health and financial impact. While the scenarios we face change by the hour and our policy responses will also need to evolve, we believe essential policy changes include but are not limited to:

- Expansion of affordable health coverage to additional West Virginians. We call on the federal government to give the states the needed flexibility to use the Medicaid program as a key tool in confronting COVID-19. This flexibility has been [extended to the states](#) in other periods of health crisis. We also call for a special open enrollment period for the Affordable Care Act private insurance state marketplaces.
- Guarantees of free COVID-19 testing and treatment to all West Virginians using multiple policy levers and new funding streams at both the federal and state levels.
- Reimbursement policies that ensure West Virginia hospitals and other health providers adequate reimbursement for providing care to all COVID-19 patients.
- Financial supports that are paid directly to lower-income West Virginia families. We call on both state and federal government to act to ameliorate the economic harm to lower-income people that results from complying with containment measures including staying home from work. Critical is a paid family and medical leave policy for all workers.
- Additional funding to food banks, meal services and other food security programs, especially for children who will be out of school and older West Virginians who rely on congregate meal sites for seniors. We call on the federal government to end work requirements in the SNAP program.
- Regulation of COVID-19 profiteering and fraud. We call on both state and federal government to ensure that players in our health system who would seek to unfairly profit from COVID-19 be identified, regulated, and face significant penalties and/or face criminal charges. Product scams and false cures on the internet must be quickly shutdown.

Every health policy discussion – indeed every policy discussion – should be refocused through the lens of this new health threat and the critical goal of health care equity across our country.

Steps must be taken at the national level and state level to provide accurate education to the public about COVID-19. West Virginians for Affordable Health Care is dedicated to doing our part through every tool available to us to share the facts about the COVID-19 health threat and to continue our work to ensure that every West Virginian can afford the health care they need.

For more information about state and federal policy developments that will impact West Virginia families as we cope together with the impact of COVID-19, please follow our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/WVAHC/>.