



**WVAHC**  
West Virginians for Affordable Health Care  
Consumer Voices for Health Care  
**2017 Press Articles**



# Principles for Health Care: Building on Progress

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) is a solid foundation for a uniquely American health care system that will achieve the goal of a nation where every person has the physical and financial security of affordable, quality health care.

Improving on this foundation is the easiest and best way to continue building toward this goal. West Virginians for Affordable Health Care is ready to work with political leaders and key stakeholders on improvements to the ACA.

If the United States Congress votes to repeal the ACA, they must simultaneously adopt a comprehensive replacement package of legislation. Before repeal, West Virginians have the right to know what will come next.

**No matter how Congress moves forward, any health care reform bill must comply with the following principles:**

- **Coverage:** 94 percent of West Virginians, including 97 percent of West Virginia's children, are covered by health insurance. We should build on this accomplishment not erode it.
- **Medicare and Medicaid:** Congress must keep the guarantee of coverage for all who are eligible for Medicare and Medicaid. And Congress should honor its commitment to match state funds for Medicaid, including the 90 percent match for the Medicaid expansion after 2020. Congress must not undo the successful design of Medicare or arbitrarily change the guarantee of benefits or cap financing. Congress must keep its commitment to close the coverage gap in Medicare's prescription drug coverage known as the doughnut hole.
- **Subsidies:** Moderate-income individuals and families who purchase individual insurance policies in the marketplace deserve meaningful tax credits and subsidies to make the cost of their premiums, deductibles, copayments and out of pocket maximums affordable.
- **Better value in health care:** Slowing down the rise in health care costs is essential, and should be accomplished by reducing the drivers of health care cost and not by shifting cost to individuals and families. Requiring Medicare to negotiate with drug manufacturers to control the cost of prescription drugs is one example of getting better value for Americans.
- **Prevention:** Prevention must be a cornerstone of our health care system and be provided without copayments or deductibles.
- **Benefits:** Congress must ensure that all insurance policies have adequate benefits including maternity coverage and comprehensive behavioral health benefits including access to treatment for opioid addiction.
- **Insurance Reforms:** Insurance companies must be barred from:
  - a) imposing pre-existing condition limitations;
  - b) charging women a higher premium than men for the exact same policy; or
  - c) imposing a cap on annual or lifetime benefits. States should retain the authority to enforce their consumer protection laws and regulations.



West Virginians for Affordable Health Care  
Consumer Voices for Health Care

## ACA repeal would undo progress on drug scourge

By Sam Hickman

The nation is facing an opioid addiction crisis that is devastating families from all economic classes. Congress has taken steps to address the epidemic: The Republican majority was important in this effort, supporting the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act and 21st Century Cures, and supporting new appropriations for prevention, treatment, and recovery. Now, this same Republican majority is attempting to repeal the Affordable Care Act - taking away one of the key tools in our nation's fight against opioid addiction.

The Affordable Care Act gave states the option to expand Medicaid and 32 states, including West Virginia, took advantage of the federal funding to do so. The Medicaid expansion has brought coverage for substance use disorders to millions of Americans, making them eligible for treatment when they had not been in the past. Make no mistake: Medicaid expansion, as a result of the ACA, reaches far more people in need of substance use disorder services than CACA or 21st Century Cures legislation.

The State Health Reform Assistance Network (a program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation) has called Medicaid "the states' most powerful tool to combat the opioid crisis" and found that 1.2 million people with substance use disorders have gained access to treatment. Medicaid is the most significant source of coverage and funding for substance use prevention and treatment.

I hope that Congress realizes the potentially disastrous impact of its actions if the Medicaid expansion is reversed. Current safety net services, such as the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment block grant, do not cover care for nearly enough consumers. At most, 10 percent of those in need of services receive them. Overdose rates continue to climb, new addicts continue to be created, and our treatment infrastructure remains shorthanded.

Lack of services has an impact far beyond increased court costs, property damage, lost productivity, and more. Forty percent of American children living in foster care with relatives are doing so because of a parent's dependency on drugs or alcohol. Hospitalizations related to use and dependence on opioids have skyrocketed. The annual economic impact from the misuse of prescription drugs, illicit drugs, and alcohol is \$442 billion. That's almost half of a trillion dollars being drained from our nation's economy as a result of this disease.

No state has been hit harder by the opioid epidemic health crisis than West Virginia:

- West Virginia filled more opioid prescriptions than there are people in the state, with 1,049 opioid prescriptions per 1,000 West Virginians.
- West Virginia had the highest drug overdose mortality rate in the nation in 2015 - 41.5 deaths per 100,000 people.

West Virginia has used the Affordable Care Act to fight the opioid addiction crisis:

- Repeal of the ACA threatens 45 percent of the state's funds for evidence-based Medication Assisted Treatment using buprenorphine to help West Virginians who are fighting opioid addiction.
- West Virginia covers more than 214,000 people with mental illnesses and substance use disorders through the Medicaid expansion and private insurance through the ACA Marketplace. Of these, 204,000 are covered through the Medicaid expansion.
- In West Virginia, the Medicaid expansion brought in \$43 million federal dollars to pay for behavioral health services in 2015, including substance use disorder treatment. Without Medicaid, West Virginia would be forced to pay for these services with state funds only.
- Addiction treatment provided in state prisons is now able to be continued when a prisoner is released, which reduces recidivism.

If the majority in Congress is serious about stemming the tide of opioid abuse, they will leave Medicaid expansion unmolested. Anything short of this will be the height of hypocrisy.

*Sam Hickman is state director of the National Association of Social Workers.*

## Three groups denounce Obamacare replacement bill

By Alex Thomas in News

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Following Monday's release of the Republican health care plan, members of three organizations say the bill would harm West Virginians and reverse the successes of President Barack Obama's health care law.

Representatives of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, the West Virginia Council of Churches and West Virginia Healthy Kids and Families Coalition held a joint press conference Tuesday regarding the proposed replacement of the Affordable Care Act.

The American Health Care Act would halt Medicaid expansion, repeal the individual mandate, remove taxes passed in the original act and block Planned Parenthood from receiving Medicaid reimbursements for one year.

The act would instead offer tax credits for purchasing health insurance, while also keeping certain portions of "Obamacare." This includes the provision allowing children to stay on their parents' plan until the age of 26, and prohibiting insurance companies from denying coverage because of pre-existing conditions.

The tax credits would be tied to age and income, with credits increasing with age.

The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy reported in January that 184,000 people could lose health care coverage if "Obamacare" was repealed.

According to Renate Pore, the interim director of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, states would be hurt by the change. This is especially in regards to Medicaid, which she said provides coverage for 175,000 West Virginians.

"Instead of helping states pay for the medical costs incurred, this bill would give states a set amount per a per capita cap," she said. "It would reduce money for the Medicaid expansion, and probably end it, especially for poor, rural states like West Virginia."

Pore also said West Virginians have greatly benefited from the current health care law, saying more people are using health care today and 97 percent of children in West Virginia have health care coverage.



Alex Thomas/WVMetroNews.com

Perry Bryant and Renate Pore of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, Jeff Allen of the West Virginia Council of Churches (L-R) and Stephen Smith with the West Virginia Healthy Kids and Families Coalition (not pictured) discussed the Republican plan to replace the Affordable Care Act.

Jeff Allen, the executive director of the West Virginia Council of Churches, said the bill would not result in people being more secure.

"The only result that will come from this bill is that more people will be sick, more be will be insecure and more people will be poor," he said. "Some people will die."

Conservative groups have voiced their concerns over the bill. Advocacy groups Heritage Action and FreedomWorks have voiced their opposition for not doing enough, with the latter group calling the bill "Obamacare-lite."

Sens. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., Rob Portman, R-Ohio, Cory Gardner, R-Colo., and Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, sent a letter Monday to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., regarding Medicaid reform, saying nothing should hinder health care access.

Reps. Alex Mooney, R-W.Va., and Evan Jenkins, R-W.Va., have said they are reviewing the bill.

Rep. David McKinley, R-W.Va., released a statement Tuesday, saying reform is necessary.

"The American Health Care Act will protect patients with pre-existing conditions, allow young adults to stay on their parent's plan, and strengthen Medicaid so current enrollees do not have their coverage taken away from them," McKinley said.

President Donald Trump voiced his support for the plan on Twitter, that "Obamacare was imploding," and further plans to boost competition between insurance and drug companies are being developed.

## **Ted Boettner: Don't squash the biggest investment in WV history**

By Ted Boettner

What if a company said they were going to invest over a billion dollars a year in West Virginia to create thousands of jobs, improve the health of our workforce, and save lives?

Most would probably say that we would be foolish to turn down this company's unprecedented investment in our state. But that is exactly what is going to happen if we repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and fail to adequately replace it.

The ACA, also known as Obamacare, represents one of the largest investments in human capital West Virginia – and the nation -- has ever seen. If the ACA repeal goes forward -- including the repeal of Medicaid expansion and health insurance premiums credits on the Marketplace -- and that money suddenly evaporates, every part of our state will feel the impact.

According to a recent analysis by Commonwealth Fund and George Washington University, West Virginia would lose approximately 16,000 jobs by 2019, 43 percent of which would be in the health-care sector alone. The rest would come from construction, retail, real estate, finance and other industries.

Between 2019 and 2023, West Virginia's business output would drop nearly \$16 billion in value – including \$7.2 billion less in federal spending. West Virginia's Gross State Product would fall by \$9 billion. With this loss in economic activity, we would see \$349 million less in state and local revenue at a time when the state faces a \$500 million budget gap this fiscal year.

The health-care sector was one of the only growing parts of our state's economy over the last several years. Since 2014, West Virginia added 6,200 jobs in health care-related industries while private-sector jobs as a whole have declined by 5,400.

The ACA has also led to steep declines in the amount of money health-care providers spend on the uninsured. Under repeal of the ACA, the Urban Institute estimates that uncompensated care in West Virginia would grow by \$500 million, including \$135 million from West Virginia hospitals alone, by 2019.

Repealing the ACA goes well beyond the direct loss of money into our state. An estimated 184,000 West Virginians would lose insurance coverage, which would more than triple the number of uninsured in West Virginia. The decline would come from ending

Medicaid expansion, federal insurance premium subsidies, and the individual mandate requiring people to buy health insurance, creating chaos that would likely collapse the insurance Marketplace under the ACA.

Hundreds of thousands of West Virginians would also lose critical patient protections under a repeal. This includes about 800,000 West Virginians – including 91,000 children – with preexisting conditions (e.g. diabetes or cancer) that could be denied coverage or face higher premiums. Over 500,000 West Virginians could see caps placed on the amount an insurer would spend over each person's lifetime and the same number of people could lose access to free preventive care such as immunizations and cancer screenings. Women could be charged premiums as high as 57 percent more than men and 12,000 young adults in the state could be booted off of their parents' health insurance plans.

The ACA has been a lifeline to West Virginians who have either gained coverage from Medicaid expansion or insurance subsidies, or who have been protected from harmful practices banned by the ACA. And there is little doubt that our state's economy has benefited tremendously from the large influx of federal funds that has boosted jobs and helped our local communities.

It is no secret West Virginia has one of the unhealthiest populations in the nation, which not only means we have more premature deaths and higher health-care costs than most states, but is also one big reason why our economy struggles to prosper and why we have the lowest labor force participation rate in the country. That's because a healthy workforce is a productive one. The last thing we should be doing is stripping away health care coverage from hundreds of thousands of West Virginians.

Instead of reversing the progress that has been made through the ACA, Congress and President Trump should preserve and build upon existing success by lowering health-care costs and expanding quality health care to everyone. This could include negotiating lower prescription drug prices, a public option in the marketplace, or moving toward a single-payer system that is supported by a majority of Americans. Repealing the ACA without an adequate replacement would be a disaster for West Virginia's economy and its people.

Ted Boettner is the executive director of the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy.

## Poll: West Virginians Favor Fixing, Not Replacing ACA

By JAMES E. CASTO, The State Journal

According to a statewide poll done for West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, an overwhelming majority of West Virginia voters want a replacement plan in place before the Affordable Care Act is repealed.

Renate Pore, interim executive director of WVAHC, said Public Policy Polling surveyed 1,128 West Virginia voters earlier this month and found 79 percent believe it's wrong to repeal without a plan to replace the ACA, including detailed steps on how to lower costs, keep people covered and protect people with pre-existing conditions.

Additionally, the majority of the poll's respondents (58 percent) said Congress should keep what works in the ACA and fix what doesn't.

"The people of our state show compassion for their fellow West Virginians, and they don't think it's responsible or compassionate to pull the rug out from people who are insured thanks to the ACA," Pore said.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the medically uninsured rate in West Virginia has fallen by 59 percent since the ACA was enacted in 2010, translating into 156,000 West Virginians gaining coverage.

Former Delegate Don Perdue, a Democrat who represented Wayne County, said he wasn't surprised by the new poll showing strong public support for fixing the ACA, rather than repealing it. Nor, he added, has he been surprised by the strong Republican effort in Congress to scrap the ACA.

Changes in the health care law are necessary, but the current "knee-jerk approach" is clearly the wrong way to go about it, he said.

"In the rush to destroy Obamacare, the health-care access of thousands of West Virginians is being forgotten," Perdue said.

Perdue, a former pharmacist, was the long-time chairman of the House Health and Human Resources Committee before Republicans won control of the House of Delegates in 2014. After nine terms in the House, he opted not to run for re-election in the November election.

The state's hospital officials are placed in a difficult position by the current uncertainty surrounding the potential repeal of ACA without a specific replacement in place, says Joe Letnaunchyn, president and CEO of the West Virginia Hospital Association.

"Hospitals are on the bubble, not knowing where things are going to go," Letnaunchyn said in a recent MetroNews interview. "We have a lot of questions and a lot of concerns about how it would impact the hospitals, the patients we serve and how we're paid for providing those services."

WVAHC's Pore said the statewide poll conducted for her organization revealed:

- 82 percent of West Virginians oppose allowing insurance companies to deny coverage for preexisting conditions.
- 78 percent oppose eliminating provisions that provide routine check-ups for people who need them the most, which includes cancer screenings and mammograms and wellness checks for children.
- 76 percent of those polled oppose eliminating funding for health coverage that will result in almost 30 million Americans losing their health insurance, including 4 million children.

"Clearly, West Virginians believe the ACA needs to be fixed, not eliminated," Pore said. "What comes after the repeal? Who the heck knows? They are asking us to hold hands, close our eyes and jump off the cliff, and by the time we get to the bottom, they will have a plan."

## Obamacare the focus of national bus tour stop in Charleston

By Carrie Hodousek in News

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — A Wheeling mom, standing on the steps of the state Capitol, said she wants a “viable” health care plan to help her 6 year old autistic son.

Ashley Torlone was in Charleston Friday, along with members of the West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, to share how her son has benefited from the Affordable Care Act.

“He was diagnosed with autism at the age of 3 and the Affordable Care Act is what provides the insurance that covers his treatments right now and the treatments that have been life changing for us,” Torlone explained to MetroNews during a rally to keep, not repeal the ACA.

The rally was supposed to include the nationwide Save My Care Bus Tour, but event organizers said the bus broke down en route to West Virginia.

Torlone said she knows adjustments need to be made to the ACA and that she wants to hear specifics regarding a replacement plan.

“I know the plan we have in place isn’t perfect, but I don’t think we should throw it out whole scale until we have something viable that isn’t going to leave people out in the cold,” she said.

The “Patient Freedom Act,” designed to be a partial replacement for the ACA, was proposed Monday. U.S. Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.) supported the legislation. The bill would allow states to keep the ACA, to choose a new state alternative or to design their own alternatives.

Torlone said she does not believe that proposed plan would work in West Virginia.

“Some states are going to do very well with that, but I think states that struggle financially — our state happens to be one of those — will probably be in a bind if that’s what comes to pass,” she said.

According to a West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy report, nearly 184,000 state residents will lose their health care if the ACA is repealed and not replaced.

The threat is scary for West Virginia, Torlone said, because the state struggles with drug and obesity problems.



Carrie Hodousek/WVMetroNews.com

Those with the West Virginians for Affordable Health Care rallied at the state Capitol Friday.

“Our population is at the greatest risk of a lot of chronic health problems that can be prevented if you can get treatment, but without the Affordable Care Act or something viable replacing it, that’s not going to be an option,” she said.

Friday’s event included state elected officials, doctors, health advocates and patients who have benefited from the Affordable Care Act.

January 26, 2017

## West Virginia to be second most affected state with ACA repeal

By Wendy Holdren, Register-Herald Reporter

According to a new West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy (WVCBP) report, repealing the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) would have far-reaching effects in the Mountain State.

“Repealing the ACA: Hurting Our Health and Our Economy,” released Tuesday, says not only 184,000 West Virginians would lose health insurance, but the state’s weak economy could falter with the loss of billions of dollars of federal funds.

An estimated 16,000 jobs would be lost by 2019 and nearly \$350 million would be lost in tax revenue over five years. The Urban Institute estimates West Virginia would lose \$14 billion in federal funds between 2019-2028, including \$12 billion supporting Medicaid/CHIP.

Another study conducted by WalletHub shows West Virginia will be the state second most impacted in the nation by the repeal.

“The ACA is much more than a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of West Virginians who have gained health coverage and important patient protections,” said WVCBP Executive Director Ted Boettner, who authored the report. “It has been a billion dollar investment in our people that has led to thousands of new jobs during a time when our state’s communities are struggling.”

The release from WVCBP, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization, said consumer protections for hundreds of West Virginians are at risk with the loss of the ACA, including pre-existing conditions, insurance plan lifetime limits or caps and free preventive care.

A replacement plan, Patient Freedom Act of 2017, proposed by four U.S. Senators, including Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W. Va., has promised to keep intact the pre-existing conditions and lifetime limits protections; however, the plan specifics did not mention preventive care measures. Capito said in a release coverage would be preserved for mental health and substance use disorders.

Proponents of the ACA have also feared loss of coverage for young adults under 26 still on their parents’ plans, but Capito said those individuals would remain protected under the replacement plan. Prescription drug costs for seniors were not addressed in the release about the replacement plan.

Julie Vaughan-Meadors, of Charles Town, and her oldest son, Zachary, are hoping those senators make good on their promise to keep protections in place.

Zachary was 23 years old when he was diagnosed with thyroid cancer — a rare diagnosis for a young man. He’s had multiple surgeries along with radioactive iodine ablation treatment, but each summer for the past three years, his cancer has returned.

Zachary, now 26 years old, fears he will not be able to utilize the final months of his health coverage under his parents’ plan if the ACA is repealed.

“He’s scared out of his mind,” Vaughan-Meadors said. “He thinks he’s going to get dropped tomorrow. We understand as adults it doesn’t happen that quickly, but as a young person, you don’t cope well with cancer to begin with.”

She continued, “This is the first time a president can touch him. It’s the first time he’s truly been affected by a president.”

Zachary will graduate from California State University in May with his degree in sociology. He has applied, and anticipates he will be hired, at a job in West Virginia.

His mom shared her pride in her son, who’s worked so hard over the past several years toward his education despite multiple setbacks.

“He went back to school nine days after surgery,” she said. “He could barely hold his head up, but he went back to school.”

Zachary is hopeful to secure the West Virginia job and obtain private insurance through the company. His mom said the biggest concern right now is him having a gap in coverage, or getting denied for having a pre-existing condition.

“Our feeling is the insurance companies will be back in charge, as opposed to having regulation on them.”

She said she hopes lawmakers, as they work to repeal and replace the ACA, will consider everyday, regular people.

“I wish they understood how it was affecting regular people, you know? People like my son. It breaks my heart that people like him have to be afraid.”

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Since the ACA was enacted, West Virginia’s uninsured population dropped from 14 percent in 2013 to 6 percent in 2016 — the lowest it has ever been.

(continued on next page)



January 26, 2017

## West Virginia to be second most affected state with ACA repeal (continued)

Kat Stoll, an author of the WVCBP report, said, “Repealing the ACA would mean turning back the clock for many West Virginians, who, since 2010, have gained affordable, comprehensive health insurance, and protections from insurance companies.”

Southern West Virginia saw decreases of 13 percent or greater in its uninsured population during that time: Mercer County (13 percent), Greenbrier County (14 percent), Monroe County (14 percent), Raleigh County (14 percent), Summers County (14 percent), Fayette County (15 percent), Wyoming County (15 percent), Nicholas County (15 percent) and McDowell County (16 percent).

The Washington Post cited a study by the New England Journal of Medicine, which found for every 455 people who gained coverage, one life was saved per year. If 20 million people lose coverage with the ACA repeal, an estimated 43,956 lives could be lost each year.

A recent report in the Journal of the American Medical Association showed from 1980 to 2014, the U.S. death rate per 100,000 people for all cancers combined dropped from about 240 to 192 — a 20 percent decline. More than 19 million Americans died from cancer during that time.

The study highlighted that cancer rates were rising in poor parts of the country, including West Virginia. Counties in West Virginia, the second poorest state in 2014 according to Forbes, experienced high or increasing rates of tracheal, bronchus and lung cancer, colon and rectum cancer, uterine cancer, kidney cancer and non-Hodgkin lymphoma, according to the report.

The ACA took effect in the study’s final years, and because cancer takes years to develop, any resulting benefits wouldn’t be evident in the latest report. The ACA, however, emphasized prevention services such as no-cost screenings for breast, colorectal and cervical cancers. The replacement plan recently announced has not shared specifics on such services.

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In the WVCBP report, authors argued the ACA should remain intact, but they acknowledged there are nearly 30 million Americans currently without health insurance coverage, including 108,000 West Virginians.

The authors called for Congress to address the following: high and rapidly escalating cost of prescription drugs; high out-of-pocket costs for people with health insurance; the availability of health insurance premium subsidies for families

who have unaffordable employer-based coverage that bases affordability on the cost of coverage for the worker alone and not on the cost of coverage for the family unit; and improved competition in health insurance marketplaces through a regulated approach.

“While these four areas of opportunity present significant challenges both from the perspective of policy design and political will, they highlight some options to meet the challenge of moving West Virginia even further forward toward a better health care system,” the report said.

The new administration’s approach to health coverage will likely include federal money, in the form of block grants, distributed to each state to provide health care to Medicaid recipients.

Many questions remain about block grants, but Doris Selko, Southern Regional Coordinator for West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, told The Register-Herald such funding would not be enough to cover the health care needs of West Virginians.

Twenty counties in West Virginia had more than 30 percent of their residents enrolled in Medicaid 2015, including Raleigh (31 percent), Summers (31 percent), Fayette (33 percent), Nicholas (33 percent), Mercer (36 percent), Wyoming (36 percent) and McDowell (48 percent).

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care will host a rally Friday in Charleston as part of the national “Save Our Care” bus tour. The rally will begin at 11 a.m. on the north side of the State Capitol.

Anyone wishing to share their story about how the ACA has impacted them is invited to email Renate Pore at [renatepore@gmail.com](mailto:renatepore@gmail.com).

— Email: [wholdren@register-herald.com](mailto:wholdren@register-herald.com) and follow on Twitter @WendyHoldren

## West Virginians show support in poll for ACA replacement

By Wendy Holdren, Register-Herald Reporter

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care (WVAHC) recently released a statewide poll that shows West Virginians overwhelmingly want a replacement plan before the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is repealed.

Public Policy Polling surveyed 1,128 West Virginia voters earlier this month and found 79 percent believe it's wrong to repeal without a replacement plan that includes how to lower costs, keep people covered and protect people with pre-existing conditions.

"There's a misconception it wouldn't affect anyone besides those who received coverage through the Medicaid expansion," said Doris Selko, southern regional coordinator for WVAHC. "But there are benefits everyone would lose."

If the ACA is repealed, children under 26 who are still on their parents' plan would lose access to coverage. Individuals with a pre-existing condition stand to lose coverage. And the cost of preventive care will increase, as the ACA requires such services be available without a co-pay or deductible.

WVAHC has reported 184,000 West Virginians stand to lose coverage if the health care measure is repealed. The majority of survey respondents (58 percent) said Congress should keep what works in the ACA and fix what doesn't. An estimated 16,000 jobs in West Virginia will also be lost.

"The people of our state show compassion for their fellow West Virginians and they don't think it's responsible or compassionate to pull the rug out from people who are insured thanks to the ACA," said Renate Pore, interim executive director of WVAHC.

"Congressional leaders should take a page out of these West Virginians' book and wait until a viable replacement plan is ready before repealing the entire law."

Selko also said it's important to know the Affordable Care Act, the ACA and Obamacare are one and the same.

"The ACA is Obamacare," she emphasized.

Many individuals who cast their vote for President Donald Trump have voiced their disapproval of Obamacare, even though many of them obtained health coverage through the mandate.

"I think they voted for their jobs and not their health," Selko shared. "I don't think people thought too much about it until it

was pretty clear it was going to be repealed. When you've had a benefit for six years, it's unthinkable it would just be taken away without something comparable."

She said the ACA has been referred to as a "bridge to the middle class" because people who received Medicaid expansion would not have been able to afford the care they receive currently.

For someone about to lose coverage, the issue isn't political: "It's a life or death thing," Selko said.

She pointed to the thousands of West Virginians struggling with addiction who will lose access to recovery services.

A data analysis, conducted by Harvard Medical School and New York University, showed more than 214,000 West Virginians suffering from addiction or mental illness will lose access to health care services if the ACA is repealed.

"How do you fight the epidemic when you can't fund the treatment?" Selko asked.

Congress is currently working to determine the specifics of budget reconciliation, which will likely pick apart the ACA piece by piece.

Selko said, "The first process is to defund it, and then destroy it."

Some Republicans have suggested states should be more self-reliant in funding their Medicaid programs, but Selko said with West Virginia's financial struggles, a block grant from the federal government would not be sufficient to cover the services the state has currently.

She urges West Virginians to call their senators and congressional representatives to let them know how they feel about the ACA. Anyone who wishes to share their story may also do so at [wvahc.org](http://wvahc.org).

Additional WVAHC poll results are as follows:

- 82 percent of West Virginians oppose allowing insurance companies to deny coverage for pre-existing conditions.
- 78 percent oppose eliminating provisions that provide routine check-ups for people who need them the most, which includes cancer screenings and mammograms and wellness checks for children.
- 76 percent of those polled oppose eliminating funding for health coverage that will result in almost 30 million Americans losing their health insurance, including 4 million children.

"Clearly West Virginians believe the ACA needs to be fixed, not eliminated," Pore said. "We hope our representatives in D.C. are listening to their constituents and put the brakes on rapid repeal without replacement."

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## Changes to Medicaid funding could affect WV's children

The fight to preserve health insurance for children in West Virginia is coming, said Renate Pore, interim executive director of the advocacy group West Virginians for Affordable Health Care on Friday.

At the first gathering of the Kids Health Partnership, activists, state officials, and representatives of the health insurance industry met to form a coalition to address the challenges facing children's health care coverage and issues like obesity and mental and behavioral health treatment for children in West Virginia.

With the fate of the Affordable Care Act in peril and debates over federal funding for Medicaid, coverage for approximately 200,000 West Virginia children insured under Medicaid lies in the balance. President Donald Trump and House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) have suggested changes to the way Medicaid is funded, with ideas like block grants, in which the federal government provides a fixed amount of money annually to pay for a state's entire Medicaid program. Another alternative are per-capita caps, which place a limit on how much money the federal government would spend on each Medicaid beneficiary.

While proponents of these ideas have argued they provide states with more flexibility, Kat Stoll, health analyst at the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, said they are "about restricting funds and shifting federal responsibility onto the states."

"We cannot, in West Virginia, carry more of a burden on our shoulders financially for this program," she added.

In West Virginia, 97 percent of children have health insurance coverage through Medicaid, the West Virginia Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), or private insurance.

CHIP, which covers about 20,000 West Virginia children, was most recently reauthorized by Congress in 2015, with funding extended only until this year.

Given that Medicaid in West Virginia covers about 10 times more children than CHIP, Pore said advocates should be wary of any policy proposals that would leave CHIP in place but make changes to Medicaid.

"CHIP is the tail wagging the dog. The real program for kids in this state and other states is Medicaid," she said.



F. BRIAN FERGUSON | Gazette-Mail file photo  
Renate Pore, with West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, said the fight to preserve health insurance for children will come as lawmakers battle over the fate of the Affordable Care Act and the future funding of Medicaid.

## **Poll: West Virginians favor fixing ACA, but want new plan in place before repeal**

CHARLESTON —Results of a statewide poll of voters released by West Virginians for Affordable Health Care (WVAHC) show West Virginians overwhelmingly want a replacement plan before the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is repealed.

Public Policy Polling surveyed 1,128 West Virginia voters earlier this month and found 79 percent believe it's wrong to repeal without a plan to replace the ACA, including how to lower costs, keep people covered and protect people with pre-existing conditions.

Additionally, the majority of respondents (58 percent) said Congress should keep what works in the ACA and fix what doesn't.

"The people of our state show compassion for their fellow West Virginians and they don't think it's responsible or compassionate to pull the rug out from people who are insured thanks to the ACA," said Renate Pore, interim executive director of WVAHC. "Congressional leaders should take a page out of these West Virginians' book and wait until a viable replacement plan is ready before repealing the entire law."

Specifically, the poll revealed:

- 82 percent of West Virginians oppose allowing insurance companies to deny coverage for pre-existing conditions.
- 78 percent oppose eliminating provisions that provide routine check-ups for people who need them the most, which includes cancer screenings and mammograms and wellness checks for children.
- 76 percent of those polled oppose eliminating funding for health coverage that will result in almost 30 million Americans losing their health insurance, including 4 million children.

The poll also found that 79 percent oppose GOP proposals that would include an immediate \$500 billion tax cut for big business and the wealthy.

"Clearly West Virginians believe the ACA needs to be fixed, not eliminated," Pore said. "We hope our representatives in DC are listening to their constituents and put the brakes on rapid repeal without replacement."

January 13, 2017

## **WV groups: Don't repeal ACA without replacement**

By TAYLOR STUCK

CHARLESTON - After an early morning vote taking the first steps to repeal the Affordable Care Act, also known as "Obamacare," West Virginians for Affordable Health Care brought together multiple state entities to urge the state's elected leaders to not repeal without a replacement plan.

"What comes after the repeal?" asked Renate Pore, WVAHC director of health policy. "Who the heck knows? They are asking us to hold hands, close our eyes and jump off the cliff, and by the time we get to the bottom, they will have a plan."

More than 200,000 West Virginians are expected to be affected by an ACA repeal if no replacement is presented. According to an Urban Institute analysis, 184,000 West Virginians would lose health coverage, and according to state officials, 169,614 West Virginians are enrolled in the Medicaid expansion authorized by the federal law. Another 37,000 residents who have received coverage on the health insurance exchange the law established could be affected by the repeal.

President-elect Donald Trump says his plan is to "repeal and replace" President Barack Obama's health care law "essentially simultaneously," though no plan has been formally proposed. Trump also has said he supports maintaining portions of the law, including coverage of pre-existing conditions and allowing those 26 and under to stay on their parents' insurance.

Pore said there are portions of the law the WVAHC is in support of improving.

"The ACA is controlling health care spending, especially in Medicare, but not so much in the private sector, and that's a problem that needs to be fixed," Pore said. "Unless you are poor enough to get Medicaid or you get financial help in the marketplace, if you are a middle class person who has to buy a policy, it is a very, very high price. And something needs to be done about it. But changing the way we do insurance is not going to solve the problem. The problem is high health care costs, especially high prescription drug prices."

Pore applauded Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., for refusing to vote for repeal without replacement and asked West Virginians to call Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., to urge her to vote against repeal without a replacement. Capito voted in favor of a repeal Thursday morning.

Other groups participating in the press conference included West Virginia Citizen Action Group, West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, SEIU Local 1199, American Friends Service Committee, West Virginia Nurses Association, West Virginia Council of Churches and West Virginia Hospital Association, all advocating for fixing, not repealing, the ACA..

## West Virginians appeal to lawmakers: Keep or replace ACA

By Lori Kersey, Weekend Editor

As Congress continues to move forward with plans to repeal the Affordable Care Act, West Virginians who have benefited from the law and their advocates gathered Thursday to ask lawmakers not get rid of it without a plan for replacing it.

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care held the news conference at its office in Charleston.

More than 175,000 West Virginians who signed up for Medicaid under expansion stand to lose coverage if the law is repealed. Another approximately 35,000 state residents could lose the plan they bought on the health insurance marketplace.

Since the enactment of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, West Virginia's uninsured rate has fallen by 57 percent, according to WVAHC.

Renate Pore, interim director of the group, said repealing the law would kill the goal of every West Virginian having access to quality health care coverage.

"Now that goal slipped beyond the horizon and we face not further progress but an unraveling of all that has been achieved," Pore said. "This is unacceptable. We cannot let it happen." Health insurance and access to care is not just an individual benefit but a social benefit, she said.

Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act has been the state's best tool in treating drug abuse problems in the state, Pore said. The repeal would also have an economic effect. It would mean 16,000 fewer jobs in West Virginia by 2019, Pore said, citing a January report from the Commonwealth Fund.

"We are now on the slippery slope of repeal," Pore said. "What comes after repeal? Well, who the heck knows? The majority party promises to replace it with something better, but no one really knows what it means."

Besides West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, representatives of the West Virginia Nurses Association, Roane General Hospital, the West Virginia Council of Churches and WV Citizens Action Group as well as a physician with Cabin Creek Health Systems and private citizens who stand to lose coverage spoke in support of keeping the Affordable Care Act.

While Pore applauded the effects of the Affordable Care Act, she admitted the law has its problems. The goal of the law was to drive down the cost of health care spending, but it hasn't done that for many in the private sector, she said.

"That's where the problem that needs to be fixed is," Pore said. "Unless you're poor enough for Medicaid or get financial assistance on the marketplace, if you're a middle-class person that has to buy a policy, it is a very, very high price."



F. BRIAN FERGUSON |  
Gazette-Mail  
Renate Pore, interim director of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, speaks Thursday during a news conference in Charleston about how a repeal of the Affordable Care Act without an immediate replacement would adversely affect the lives of West Virginians.

The reason for the high costs are the country's high prescription drug prices, she said. It's time for Republicans to govern and stop grandstanding, she said.

Pore thanked Sen. Joe Manchin for voting against the repeal. Manchin has argued for fixing the law instead of repealing it completely, saying he would not vote to repeal the law without first seeing what Republicans aimed to replace it with.

Pore also appealed to Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, who voted in favor of the repeal, to reconsider her position. She encouraged those in attendance to contact Capito to do the same.

"We have to keep this pressure on her," Pore said.

Mary Ann Claytor, a St. Albans resident who ran for state auditor last year, also spoke in support of keeping the Affordable Care Act. Claytor's son, Cedric, developed a rare disease at age 20. The disease caused blood clots that damaged his liver, she said.

"I didn't realize that I had this fine print in our [insurance] policy that I had a million dollar maximum lifetime benefits [limit]," Claytor said. "So, once he met the million dollars, he would have been taken off."

As Claytor and her family waited for Cedric to receive a liver transplant, the insurance company continued to send reminders that they were reaching the limit on their benefits.

"How would you imagine that you are worried about whether your child is going to live or your child is going to die and you are getting these letters from the insurance company keeping you on a countdown, just counting down the time," she said.

The Affordable Care Act put an end to lifetime benefit caps and requires companies to offer health insurance to people even if they have pre-existing health conditions that make their care costly.

But Claytor worries that if the law is repealed, her insurance company might reinstate the limits. Her son, who is now paralyzed and requires her help full time, acquired a second rare disease, she said. He's reached more than \$1 million in insurance benefits. Would another insurance company cover him with his pre-existing health conditions?

"I urge our representatives to look in their own children's faces and to imagine they're in this situation," Claytor said.

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## W.Va. coalition denounces repeal of ACA, Medicaid expansion

By Carrie Hodousek in News

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — A West Virginia coalition of health care providers, administrators, advocacy groups, faith based organizations and individuals are putting the pressure on lawmakers to keep Obamacare in place, hours after the U.S. Senate took the first major step toward repealing it.

Members of the West Virginians for Affordable Health Care held a press conference Thursday afternoon in Charleston to express their concerns over the repeal.

Renate Pore, WVAHC interim executive director, said keeping the Affordable Care Act is better than eliminating it without a replacement.

“What we object to is how they’re going to replace it. Health care is a very complicated system. You repeal one piece, the whole thing kind of unravels,” Pore said.

Early Thursday morning, the U.S. Senate voted 51-48 for a GOP-backed budget measure that eliminates an ACA filibuster threat. The vote does not repeal the measure, but instead, sets the stage for Republicans to clear the first procedural hurdle toward the repeal. The bill will now go to the House of Representatives for a Friday vote.

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) voted to keep the ACA in place. Now, the WVAHC is urging U.S. Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.) to do the same.

“Our message is please don’t do any harm,” Pore said. “Change it if you can make it better, but don’t do any harm.”

Thursday’s news conference included speakers who discussed their ACA coverage for pre-existing health conditions, routine checkups and tax credits for low income families.

“These patients are dental hygiene assistants, mechanics, waitresses, gas station attendants, sons and daughters of coal miners, all threaded together by their shared experience of ‘barely getting by,’” Dr. Jessica McColley, a Braxton County native and physician with Cabin Creek Health Systems, told the crowd. “They are only now sharing the reality of full access to care, with the threat of all care being ripped away.”

Pore said more people have been speaking out about their health issues because of the fear it will be eliminated.



Carrie Hodousek/MetroNews  
The West Virginians for Affordable Health Care held a press conference in Charleston Thursday afternoon.

“We try all the time to get people to come out and say ‘well, this is how it’s helping me.’ That’s very hard to do. People don’t want to come out and talk about their medical problems and the fact that we have some people who will do that now — it’s actually easier now because it’s under threat than before,” she said.

According to the WVAHC, nearly 210,000 West Virginians could be at risk of losing their health care coverage if the ACA is dismantled.