

HEALTH CARE REVIEW



West Virginians
FOR AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

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WEST VIRGINIANS FOR AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE WELCOMES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care (WVAHC) is pleased to announce Ellen Allen as its new executive director, effective August 15, 2023. Allen brings over 35 years management and leadership experience to WVAHC.

"I am honored to be working alongside experts in the field of healthcare to advance public policy that gives West Virginians a voice in healthcare choices," said Allen. "I look forward to continuing in the tradition of West Virginians for Affordable Healthcare to promote public policy that makes for better informed and healthier families."

Allen most recently served as Executive Director for Mountain State Spotlight, a nonprofit newsroom. She provided executive leadership at Covenant House, a Charleston based non-profit, for over 10 years. Allen's tenure at Covenant House included advancing housing rights and opportunities that prevented homelessness, improved food security, and improved access to high quality and affordable health care for persons experiencing homelessness, low wage workers, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

"We are very excited to have Ellen at the helm of our organization," said WVAHC Board President, Sharon Carte. "Our local community is already familiar with Ellen's leadership as former director of Covenant House in Charleston, where she had to meet many healthcare challenges for the people served there."

Under Ellen's tenure, Covenant House received the 2017 Non-Profit Award of Excellence.

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care brings a consumer voice to public policy so that every West Virginian has quality, affordable health care and the opportunity to lead an informed, healthy and productive life. It achieves its mission by working with partners to identify and advocate for positive public policy change, developing and coordinating innovative public education programs, protecting and preserving programs that serve its mission, and assisting individual consumers in navigating the healthcare system. "We are confident Allen's experience and dynamic leadership will build an even stronger organization to continue promoting sound health policy and improving quality, affordable health care for our citizens," said Carte. "We look forward to what this future phase of our work will look like." Allen is a life-long advocate and public servant. She is passionate about health care and brings a wealth of non-profit leadership to WVAHC. A lifelong West Virginian, Allen is a graduate of Concord University and holds an MBA from Averett University. She has a 29-year daughter, Sarah, and is married to Sue Julian.



Ellen Allen

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK:

Battle Won, But Fight Still On...

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care (WVAHC) and its communications team worked tirelessly back in May during the debt limit fight in Congress showing how additional Medicaid reporting requirements would negatively impact West Virginia, ultimately winning the battle to protect an estimated 220,000 enrollees who get health coverage there. It was great to see the WVAHC team at work getting the message out on what was at stake. Alongside partners West Virginia Citizen Action Group (WVCAG) and West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy (WVCBP), WVAHC launched a multi-media campaign that included radio interviews, op-eds in newspapers statewide, social media posts, and personal story-telling helped destroy an easy myth that work requirements were needed to cut Medicaid costs when most Medicaid beneficiaries, in fact, already work. In reality, the proposed work requirements were work reporting requirements which mainly serve as procedural barriers to accessing health care for low-income West Virginians, and would result in many who truly qualified for health care coverage being dropped from the rolls!

Sadly, we can expect this issue to raise its ugly head once again as Congress begins in September to approve the federal expenditures for the coming year. This time however, the same discussion will not just revolve around work requirements for Medicaid, but also important safety net programs such as SNAP and WIC!

Once again, you can count on us. We will join our partners to fight back and against harmful policies and actions that would hurt West Virginians.

-Sharon Carte
WVAHC Board President

COPAY CAPS HELP LOWER RX COSTS

WVAHC, along with West Virginia Citizen Action Group (WVCAG) and other non-profit advocacy organizations celebrated a major legislative win this year in the fight for insulin affordability. Senate Bill 577 (SB 577), which was signed into law in March, reduces the cost of insulin to \$35 per 30-day supply and states that the cost of devices shall not exceed \$100 per 30 days. It also removes the prescription for a blood test for ketones. The impact on West Virginia diabetics and families will be monumental.



Senator Capito, Kim Jones, Jude Stephens

This legislative win is a direct result of an education campaign spearheaded in 2019 by former West Virginia Delegate Barbara Fleischauer. The predatory and exploitative practices of insulin producers over the last decade had more than tripled the cost of the medicine diabetics need to stay alive, so Delegate Fleischauer took a busload of West Virginians to Canada to buy insulin at a fraction of the cost they were paying in the United States. The following year, WVAHC, WVCAG and other advocacy partners were

successful in passing West Virginia's first insulin affordable bill capping out of pocket consumer costs at \$100 a month. While this was a major win for West Virginians, this was still too high for West Virginians who were continuing to struggle.

Even with back to back legislative wins, the fight for insulin affordability continues, only this time at the national level. While the Biden administration successfully passed a \$35 insulin copay cap for Medicare recipients, millions of Americans with private or no insurance continue to struggle. Thus, members of our health care coalition, along with local volunteer storytellers, traveled to Washington earlier this month seeking a national insulin copay cap. We met with policy advisors for Senator Manchin, Senator Capito and Representative Miller.

Looking ahead to the 2023 legislative session, WVAHC and its health care coalition members will be advocating for a bill that creates an emergency safety net to individuals with an urgent need for insulin, as well as a long-term assistance program. The bill will be modeled after Minnesota's Alec Smith Insulin Affordability Act. The bill would require insulin producers to provide one month a year of emergency insulin to diabetics who cannot afford it or have a change or lapse in insurance coverage. Alec Smith was a 26-year-old Minnesotan who, being unable to afford the \$1,300 monthly cost of insulin, died rationing his medication after aging out of his parents insurance. The bill was passed in 2021 in his memory.

WVAHC looks forward to working with the Legislature to pass this much-needed bill. Our loved ones and neighbors deserve affordable medicines - it is our mission to help make that happen.

THE WEST VIRGINIA BRIDGE HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN

Formerly known as the Medicaid Buy-In bill

WVAHC is continuing its work on a bill that would create a new health insurance option for workers in West Virginia who earn too much money to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford other insurance options available to them.

During the 2023 legislative session WVAHC championed HB 3274, the Medicaid Buy-In bill. WVAHC executed two statewide media tours regarding the bill and its benefits to West Virginia workers, appearing on WKKX, WCHS, WRNR and MetroNews radio. In order to raise awareness and garner support for the legislation, the interviews coincided with news stories on WBOY-TV, WCHS-TV and West Virginia Public Broadcasting, as well as, coverage in The Intelligencer, Weirton Daily Times, Parkersburg News and Sentinel, The Journal, The Intermountain, Mountain State Spotlight and Charleston Gazette-Mail.

The West Virginia Bridge Health Insurance Plan, formerly known as the Medicaid Buy-In, is designed to address the problems caused by high premiums and deductibles in our current system. Many hourly or low-wage workers earn too much money to qualify for Medicaid, but at the same time, cannot afford other quality options - sometimes known as the "Medicaid cliff." This new, affordable health insurance plan would be accessible to these hardworking West Virginians.

Many workers must move on and off the Medicaid during the course of the year due to seasonal increases in hours or other income fluctuations.

The bill would reduce the number of times workers need to change their health insurance by providing a new, affordable "bridge" insurance plan for workers who otherwise lose their coverage. The bill will increase competition in the nongroup market by giving a target group of lower-wage workers a new health insurance option. The goal of this bill is to increase the number of workers with health coverage, decrease their health care expenses, and eliminate the possibility and fear of losing access to affordable health care.

The bill received bi-partisan support and passed the House of Delegates 73-19 with 8 members absent or not voting. It was not taken up for consideration in the Senate. With legislative interim committee meetings set to resume in August, stay tuned for more on this issue as WVAHC continues its efforts to educate, inform and pass the Bridge Plan.

IMPORTANT CHANGES COMING TO WEST VIRGINIA MEDICAID & CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAMS

Do you or a family member currently have health coverage through West Virginia Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)? If so, you may need to take steps in order to find out if your coverage will continue. West Virginia started its Medicaid and CHIP eligibility reviews earlier this year, meaning you could be disenrolled from the programs if you don't take the necessary steps. It's important that enrollees receiving services in West Virginia verify and update their mailing address, phone number, email, and other contact information.

Check your mail! The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) will mail a letter about current eligibility for the recipient with Medicaid or CHIP coverage, and alert you if you need to complete a renewal form in order to continue coverage for West Virginia Medicaid or CHIP. If a renewal form is received, **fill it out and return it** to your local West Virginia DHHR office right away. This may help enrollees avoid a gap in coverage.

Health Care Options for People Losing West Virginia Medicaid or CHIP program:

During the pandemic, people on Medicaid and WVCHIP did not have to reapply each year to determine their eligibility, but that came to an end on March 31st when the federal health emergency came to an end.

Now that the federal health emergency has ended, West Virginia is returning to its regular operations and has restarted eligibility reviews. What does that mean? This means some adults and children could lose their Medicaid or CHIP if they don't take the necessary steps to re-qualify for coverage. If an enrollee is told they have lost or will soon lose coverage, here are some important things to know:

- 1** **Anyone can re-apply for West Virginia Medicaid or CHIP programs at any time** to find out if they qualify for coverage, as the eligibility rules can change. If an individual's income level or medical needs change, they can re-apply for the West Virginia Medicaid or CHIP program to find out if they still qualify. **There's no limit to the number of times you can apply.** To reapply, visit <https://www.wvpath.wv.gov/> or call the local DHHR in your area. If you need assistance applying, you can go to your local department of human resources office for assistance.
- 2** **Individuals may be able to obtain low-cost, quality health coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace** if they have been deemed ineligible for state healthcare programs. Our friends at the West Virginia Navigator's services offer assistance to find the best healthcare coverage for you and your family, all free of charge. Call 1-844-WV-CARES or visit <https://acanavigator.com/wv/home>. West Virginia Navigators will help you find the best plan for your needs. Once you have been marked as ineligible for West Virginia Medicaid or CHIP, you have until July 31, 2024, to apply on the marketplace.
- 3** **Employer-based coverage** may be offered at your place of work now. If so, find out how to decide between job-based or Marketplace coverage. Let the West Virginian Navigators help break the process down to find the best option for everyone.

Questions? Reach out to West Virginians for Affordable Health Care at info@wvahc.org or (681) 265-9008. WVAHC wants to bring a consumer voice to public policy so that every West Virginian has quality, affordable health care and the opportunity to lead an informed, healthy, and productive life. Our goal is to achieve our mission by working with partners to identify and advocate for positive public policy change, developing and coordinating innovative public education programs, protecting, and preserving programs that serve our mission, and assisting individual consumers in navigating the healthcare system.

WV NAVIGATOR

1-844-WV-CARES

West Virginia's Health Insurance Helpline

BRINGING SMILES TO RURAL WEST VIRGINIA

A Storybanking Collaboration with West Virginia Health Right

This summer our WVAHC Storybanker, Mariah Plante, teamed up with West Virginia Health Right's Mobile Dental Clinic, which travels throughout the state providing accessible, high-quality oral health care to low-income West Virginians. By following the Health Right team on its journey through the most rural and underserved parts of the state, WVAHC hopes to capture the stories of patients who utilize this innovative program and celebrate the providers who go above and beyond to bridge this gap in health care access. This collaboration highlights our commitment to promoting affordable and comprehensive health services in our communities.

The Mobile Dental Clinic, initiated by Dr. Angie Settle, CEO of West Virginia Health Right, was born out of the recognition of a pressing need for dental care in rural parts of the state, particularly in the aftermath of the 2016 flooding. With input from the state dental director, local dentists, and in collaboration with Marshall Health and the Marshall University Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine, a 38-foot Gooseneck trailer was transformed into a state-of-the-art Mobile Dental Clinic. This mobile unit travels to areas where there are no local dentists or limited access to transportation and health insurance. Its ability to provide dental services in parking lots of local healthcare facilities and hospitals ensures accessibility for those in need. Serving five counties on a rotating schedule: Clay, Boone, Logan, Roane, and McDowell—the clinic aims to establish a reliable and recurring presence in communities, which has been key to its success.

Greta Nelson, a registered dental hygienist, has been with the Health Right Mobile Dental Clinic since its inception. She says the needs of the communities they serve have evolved over time:

At first we saw a lot of pain and infection...people in their 50s and 60s who've never seen a dentist—and if they have seen one, they either had a bad experience or it was financially hard on them. We see a lot of tooth loss as a result of that reluctance. Six years in, we're able to focus on prevention. Implementing hygiene services, focusing on maintaining your teeth versus losing and replacing them... We've seen a lot of success in patients that started with us, they're still with us. They're coming in for their routine care and that's having a positive impact on their overall health.



The need for programs like the Mobile Dental Clinic is underscored by the scarcity of dental care providers in West Virginia. According to [data](#) from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, 54 out of 55 counties in the state are designated as "Health Professional Shortage Areas" for dental care. The lack of access to dental services, especially in lower-income and rural communities, creates what are known as "dental deserts." This situation forces individuals to either travel long distances for dental care or neglect their oral health, leading to more severe medical complications.

The Health Right Mobile Dental Clinic addresses this issue directly, making a visible and accessible impact on communities like Welch, where residents haven't had access to a full-time dentist in years. The clinic makes a monthly, multi-day stop in front of the Welch Community Hospital, making it visible and accessible to patients who may be visiting the hospital for other things.

Like rain on this dreary morning in June, patients trickle in from all directions. Some drive themselves or carpool with family members. Many arrive on foot, despite the weather. "For McDowell County, there are so many people that can't afford to go to the dentist or don't have a way to the dentist," says Sherry Prevento as she waits for her appointment. "A lot of people around here don't have a driver's license. If they do, maybe they don't have a car. Or they're older so they can't drive so far away just to see a dentist. So this is amazing, that they [Health Right] come right to us."

Kimberly Grubb, a retired grandmother and former employee of the Welch Community Hospital, has been a patient of the Mobile Dental Clinic for just over a year now. She's here to have three cavities filled—a procedure she'd put off because the price tag of just one filling: \$250 quoted to her by one dentist, was simply too much for her to afford on a fixed income. "It's so expensive," she says. "A lot of people here don't have that type of money. So I'm appreciative of this." Thanks to the Health Right program, she's able to get those fillings for free, as well as regular cleanings and preventative care that will help her avoid more extensive work in the future.

Keeping the Mobile Dental Clinic on the road is a labor of love. Similar programs often have a short lifespan due to limited funding or high provider turnover. Like Greta Nelson, Dr. Malav B. Shah has worked with the Mobile Dental Clinic from the very beginning. They commute several hours a day from Charleston to meet their patients close to home.

According to Dr. Shah, programs like the Mobile Dental Clinic are important to invest in long-term, because oral health is an ongoing need. "You can't come in just one time, do an extraction, some fillings, and think you've fixed the problem," he explained. "You have to return again and again." By investing in a community and the people who live there, positive generational habits start to form. "Educating the parents and letting them transfer that to their children. It's a lot of work, but that's why I decided to stick around after the first year. Because I enjoy coming here, and because there is a tremendous need....That's the second paycheck you don't see. Helping people."

"People smile more when they aren't in pain," Nelson added. "And that's important to us. That people's teeth feel good and work properly so they can live happier, better lives."

Do YOU have a health care story to share? We want to hear from you. Visit wvahc.org/stories or contact mariah@wvahc.org to start your advocacy journey.

WVAHC Kids' Health

WV Kids' Health Partnership

In May we came together to have a partnership meeting to discuss the legislative session and the CDC's newest data stressing the rise in sexual violence against teen girls and LGBTQ+ youth. This data was the result of Youth Risk Behavior Study done nationally every two years in both public and private schools. This survey has shown an increase in sexual violence being reported by teen girls from 2017 to 2022. Both girls and LGBTQ+ are experiencing high levels of trauma and high rates of violence resulting in poor mental health and suicidal thoughts. According to CDC "Nearly 1 in 3 (30%) seriously considered attempting suicide" and "1 in 5 (18%) experienced sexual violence in the past year".

As these rates continue to rise and access to mental health providers continues to be a challenge, some of the suggested solutions presented are access to and expansion of school-based programming. More specifically, curriculum and programs that provide an understanding of consent, vocalizing needs and social-emotional learning.

We look forward to connecting with others who are prioritizing the health and wellbeing of West Virginia's youth. We want to thank our friends at WV Free and Mission WV for providing classes and access to this very needed education already. We look forward to seeing these programs expand as they are needed and recommended. We also want to thank the school nurses who joined this conversation and play such an important role in this work going forward.

Pride Month

As an organization that supports LGBTQ+ rights and equality in health care we were pleased that our staff was able to attend multiple pride events across the state as part of our summer activities. WVAHC kids' health supports advocacy efforts to expand access to mental health services for LGBTQ+ youth and expanded school programming. We are thankful for the community pride event organizers who invited us to provide resources and connect with so many young people and their families during the month of June and to organizations such as Fairness WV and ACLU who take the lead on legislation that protects our youth.

Lyme Prevention and Awareness

West Virginia has one of the highest rates of Lyme and Tick-Borne illness and they continue to increase. As a beautiful green and rural state our potential risk for an increase in tick activity should be a concern. Most ticks do not die in cold temperatures until well below freezing, they will start to die once the temperature is below 10 degrees consistently, which is rare in West Virginia winters.

Diagnostic resources for Lyme are limited and often inaccurate. Treatment options are incredibly limited as well, with 15% of patients reporting chronic or post treatment symptoms. Which is why prevention and prevention education are so important and should be prioritized.

Throughout the United States, Lyme disease is the leading vector-borne disease with far less funding for research and prevention programs than diseases that aren't as common have, such as Malaria and West Nile Virus. With close to 500,000 cases of Lyme reported in the U.S. each year, current efforts and funding is simply not sufficient.

The public needs to be educated on what options are available to prevent tick bites and how to proceed if you do find a tick on the body. For example, if a tick is removed the wrong way there is higher chance for transmission of disease and infection. Most individual do not know you can then save and send a tick in for testing after removal.

Our Director of Child Health has been an advocate for increased federal funding for Lyme testing and prevention resources for the past several years. She has started to work with national Lyme organizations with the hopes of reaching children with prevention education and getting prevention curriculum into WV classrooms. If you are interested in having resources at your summer camp or in your classroom this fall please contact julianne@wvahc.org



Lyme disease is more of a risk in rural areas than in urban areas.

Back to School

Believe it or not, it's time to start scheduling those back-to-school well-child visits with your pediatrician! These visits are so important to keep track of growth and development and to make sure your child has the recommended vaccinations for their age and essential for starting school or daycare. These visits can be crucial in prevention and early identification of illness and childhood diseases and can be essential in identifying common delays in development. Getting to know your pediatrician during well-child visits allows you to establish a more comfortable relationship with them and ask questions about concerns in a variety of topics such as: healthy habits, behavior, diet and sleep schedules. Your pediatrician can provide screenings for vision and hearing and assess mental health and wellbeing. Talk to your Pediatrician about your concerns and ask for resources that may be available. Early intervention can help your child get the support they need before a minor issue has the opportunity to become a major one. Help your child have the best possible school year!



Disability Pride Month

July was disability pride month and we celebrated and honored those within the disability community! As we support visibility and equality among children with disabilities here are a few things to remember and ways to celebrate.

Children are more vulnerable than adults to bullying-it's important to create safe spaces that focus on acceptance and to lead by example. Teach the children around you how to be more inclusive.

**Make sure
your child
is up to
date on
needed
vaccines!**

Cont.

Support companies that support inclusion-Purchase from companies and brands that produce toys that feature positive representation or education and companies that prioritize hiring individuals with disabilities.

Seek inclusive entertainment-View movies and shows that focus on visibility and hire humans with disabilities to play roles specific to their disability. Read stories about people with disabilities. Some choices for children's books include:

Itzhak: A Boy Who Loved the Violin

Roll With It

Lila and Hadley

The Silence Between Us

Aven Green Sleuthing Machine: Volume 1

We Are the Same in a Different Way

Educate others about Disability Pride month- The colors on the flag symbolize a variety of disability experiences.

Red: physical disabilities

Gold: cognitive and intellectual disabilities

White: nonvisible and undiagnosed disabilities

Blue: psychiatric disabilities

Green: sensory disabilities

Black Back ground: Mourns those with disabilities that have died due to negligence, illness, eugenics and suicide.



How will
you
celebrate
Disability
Pride
Month?

We are only as strong as your support!

Thanks to the generous support of our volunteers, donors, and supporters like you, West Virginians for Affordable Health Care is able to defend and protect Medicaid and other important programs for West Virginians. On behalf of our staff and board we say thank you ensuring that every West Virginian has access to affordable, quality health care.

We know that in the coming years, there will be attempts in Washington and in Charleston to undermine these programs that protect the physical and financial health of West Virginians. More than 650,000 West Virginians – children, adults with disabilities, seniors, and hard-working low-wage families - rely on Medicaid. Our fight is truly about saving the lives of our family, friends, and neighbors.

Your support will make a real, lasting impact on the health and wellbeing of West Virginians. Please know that all donations are tax deductible.

Membership Levels

\$20 Concerned Citizen

\$50 Health Booster

\$100 Mountain Strong

\$500 and up Health Care Champion

Action Supporter: Students/under-employed folks

Signup as a member and share information on issues with friends; write letters to the editor to share your concerns on health care topics, make your legislators aware of how much health care issues mean to you!

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If you prefer to donate online, [please click here!](#)



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