

Nebraskans with Disabilities: What You Need to Know

If you are an individual with a disability or have a family member with a disability you need to read this.

Medicaid and other human service programs face significant cuts in, or elimination of, services. Nebraska's policymakers are targeting these programs as a response to the state's current budget shortfall. The choices currently being considered, to cut and deny human services, represent a retreat from this state's commitment to help and to serve Nebraska's most vulnerable citizens. But there are other options. Rather than looking at ways in which to streamline and increase efficiency without reducing necessary services to people with disabilities, Nebraska's policymakers are looking to cut and eliminate many human services and other programs serving people with disabilities, their families, seniors, and other vulnerable citizens. These proposed cuts and elimination come on the heels of cuts in Medicaid and other human services that Nebraska has already made. Only with your help can the proposed further reductions in services be averted or lessened. The choices made now will determine how well Nebraska can serve these populations.

Nebraska Health and Human Services (HHS) has listed in its Agency Modifications List Report reductions in programs, services, and supports that will have a significant negative impact on people with disabilities, their families, seniors and other groups. For example, HHS has proposed in their report to:

- **Reduce funds to community programs for persons with developmental disabilities**

This option presumes that developmental disability provider organizations are receiving funds in excess of what is required to provide quality services to individuals in their care. A careful analysis of community provider budgets will show nothing could be further from the truth. This particular option will very likely force at the very least some community based developmental disability programs to cease operations in Nebraska, decreasing community service capacity and also the opportunity for options and choices for Nebraska citizens with disabilities

- **Reduce prescription drug coverage for adults**

The Department of Health & Human Services is proposing to limit prescription drugs to 10 prescriptions per month. Prescription drug costs are currently one of the most significant expenditures made by the Medicaid program. Currently there are 5,352 individuals who have more than 10 prescriptions per month. The limitations on prescription drug coverage for adults would result in a decrease in Federal Funds to the Department.

- **Eliminate behavioral health hotline and family navigator programs**

Governor Heineman has stated that Nebraska's vision for child welfare is to "allow children to remain at home instead of becoming state wards". The Family Navigator program and the Family Helpline were developed after the Safe Haven situation resulted in families leaving their children at emergency rooms across the state. The hotline and Family Navigator programs were designed to assist families with a youth experiencing an urgent behavioral health situation to respond to that immediate urgent situation and avoid utilization of emergency levels of care. This service also provides assistance to the caller in identifying and connecting to potential resources within the current behavioral health system.

The proposed elimination of the behavioral health hotline and family navigator programs would result in caregivers utilizing emergency services when their youth experience behavioral health situations, as an alternative to more appropriate less-expensive treatment services. In some instances, families may remain without services or any assistance in identifying resources to

meet their family's needs, often placing the youth at higher risk. The service received just over **1,500** calls from 1/1/10 to 6/30/10, and is expected to serve **a minimum of 5,000** in FY11.

- **Eliminate coverage for vision, dental, and chiropractic services**

Vision-- Nebraska Medicaid covers eye examinations to determine the need for glasses, the purchase of glasses, and necessary repairs. Currently, eye exams for adults 21 years and older are limited to one every 24 months. Medicaid covers eyeglasses including lenses and frames when required for medical reasons: the client's first pair of prescription eyeglasses; size change needed due to growth; or a prescribed lens change only if new lenses cannot be accommodated by the current frame. If vision services were to be eliminated, approximately **30,310** adults would no longer receive vision services under the Medicaid program and would result in a decrease in Federal Funds to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Dental-- Nebraska Medicaid covers dental services such as cleaning of teeth, fillings, extractions, X-rays, dental surgery, and dental disease control. Approximately **33,238** adults would no longer receive dental services under the Medicaid program. Any savings would be delayed beyond the effective date of the change because Medicaid payments are based on date of service rather than date of payment, would result in a decrease in Federal Funds to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

Chiropractic Services--Nebraska Medicaid covers chiropractic services provided in the office or the client's home. Covered services are limited to x-rays and manual manipulation of the spine. For clients age 21 and older: manual manipulation of the spine is limited to 12 treatments per calendar year. The proposal to eliminate chiropractic services under Nebraska Medicaid means that approximately **3,937** adults would no longer receive chiropractic services under the Medicaid program. Any savings would be delayed beyond the effective date of the change because Medicaid payments are based on date of service rather than date of payment and would result in a decrease in Federal Funds to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

- **Eliminate disability-related child-care**

National statistics cite that the large majority of individuals with disabilities reside with their families. Recent national reports found Nebraska ranked 50th in family support expenditures for families with children who have a developmental or other disability. (Braddock et al 2008) Eliminating this program will significantly increase the duress on already underserved Nebraska families. If enacted, many parents will likely be forced to leave their jobs to care for, or in the worst case, institutionalize their child.

These are only a small sample of the dozens of proposed cuts to human service programs. For a full listing of the cuts being considered, go to:

<https://das-nebs.ne.gov/public/faces/brdIndex.jsp;jsessionid=A1690AFCD34F5F084A13A0D73137FA6A>