

Democratic Proposal to Improve Health Coverage in Response to COVID-19

With the nation's health care system reeling under the unprecedented strain of the COVID-19 pandemic, and hard-hit American families struggling with the health and financial consequences, Senate Democrats are pushing a bold and multi-pronged public health care response to the crisis. Our Agenda stands up to the Trump Administration's efforts to make health care harder to access, and says "no" to cutting Medicaid funding and promoting junk insurance plans. Instead, Senate Democrats are responding with a health care coverage plan that prioritizes quality, affordable health care and makes it available to every American family when they need it. We propose:

Improve Health Coverage and Care Affordability for Middle-Class Americans

Expand Access to Premium Assistance: Premium Tax credits are currently capped at 400% of the federal poverty level (\$51,040 for an individual in 2020). By removing the current cap on income, more middle class individuals and families will be able to afford high quality health coverage. Senator Shaheen's "[Improving Health Insurance Affordability Act](#)" would lift these caps to allow more families to qualify for support.

Increase Tax Credits to Protect Families from the Effects of Trump Sabotage: The Trump Administration's policies to sabotage the ACA have spiked marketplace premiums and increased the number of uninsured. Increasing the percentage of the premium that tax credits help cover will allow more Americans to afford quality insurance coverage. Shaheen's [legislation](#) would also increase the value of tax credits.

Provide Peace of Mind on Potential Tax Credit Penalties: People who lose their jobs or have their hours changed will have trouble predicting their annual income, particularly during this time of severe disruption. As a result, many may forgo enrolling in private health coverage out of concern that they may be forced to repay thousands of dollars in premium assistance on Tax Day. There is a cap on repayment obligations for some, but none for those with incomes over 400 percent of the poverty line. Implementing a premium tax credit "true up" holiday will give Americans more peace of mind when signing up for insurance coverage. Senators Cardin and Van Hollen introduced [legislation](#) to provide this true up holiday.

Cover all costs for COVID-19 treatment: Our health as a nation has never been more reliant on the health and safety of individuals. Securing coverage for COVID-19 treatment at no cost to all patients will eliminate any cost barriers, help stop the spread of this disease and save lives.

Allow More Americans to Access Comprehensive, Affordable Health Coverage

Provide a federal special enrollment period: Despite calls from patient groups, health insurers, Governors, and Democrats in Congress, the Administration has refused to offer a special enrollment period for federally operated marketplaces. Although the Affordable Care Act establishes an automatic special enrollment period for workers who lose their insurance because they lose their job, numerous state-based exchanges have opened special enrollment periods to allow the uninsured and others to purchase coverage. Mandating a special enrollment period would allow millions of Americans to access health care coverage during

this public health crisis. Senator Reed [sent a letter](#) and Senator Casey [released a proposal](#) that would establish this special enrollment period during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Restore funding for marketplace outreach and enrollment support: Executive actions that cut marketing and enrollment support has made it more difficult for individuals to shop for health insurance. Reinstating these resources would help countless customers search for and find the best insurance plan for themselves and their families and make sure they are taking advantage of opportunities to sign up for coverage like automatic special enrollment periods. Senator Shaheen’s [“MORE Health Education Act”](#) would restore this marketing and enrollment support funding.

Deliver COBRA subsidies for the newly unemployed: Millions of newly unemployed workers now find themselves without health coverage. In addition to the automatic special enrollment period established by the Affordable Care Act, COBRA continuation coverage is an option for staying covered. Since COBRA premiums are often very high, a subsidy to help pay premiums would help patients and families retain the coverage they are on now. A similar policy was enacted by the 2009 stimulus bill to help families retain health insurance coverage. Senator Durbin has [pressed](#) for COBRA premium assistance in future COVID-19 legislation.

Pass the SAME Act to incentivize Medicaid expansion in holdout states and support Medicaid, an essential social safety net: Currently, fourteen states have not expanded Medicaid, leaving over two million adults in the coverage gap without access to comprehensive, affordable health coverage. Senator Warner’s [“SAME Act”](#) will enhance payments to states in order to incentivize Medicaid expansion and improve the fiscal health of state governments. It is vital to support essential social safety net programs like Medicaid that helps ensure Americans have access to comprehensive, affordable coverage.

Protect Americans with Pre-Existing Conditions

Prohibit the sale of junk plans: Instead of protecting customers from risky plan options, the Administration has expanded and promoted short-term limited-duration insurance or “junk plans” that discriminate against people with pre-existing conditions and do not cover the essential health benefits -- like prescription drugs, cancer treatment, mental health, or maternity care. Patients with junk plans have already been stuck with huge bills for coronavirus testing, and patients with COVID-19 who sign up for a junk plan risk having their treatment denied on the basis of their pre-existing condition. Senator Baldwin’s [“No Junk Plans Act”](#) would overturn these rules and ensure that insurers cannot sell coverage that leaves patients paying huge bills for testing and treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prevent federal spending on junk plans and weakened consumer protections: The Trump Administration issued guidance that allows states to waive critical ACA consumer protections. These waivers allow insurers to sell plans that don’t meet consumer protections for comprehensiveness and affordability in states where they are granted. They would also let states funnel taxpayer money to junk plans. Rescinding the guidance that would permit these waivers will stop wasteful spending on junk plans and protect patients with pre-existing conditions. Senator Warner’s [“Protecting Americans with Pre-existing Conditions Act”](#) would rescind this guidance.