http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/covid-19-india-test-s5.jpg



Governor's Relief Plan Makes Progress on Free Treatment which is excluded in GOP package

Statewide - A major difference between Governor Evers and State Legislative leadership will, unless addressed, hamper Wisconsin's COVID-19 containment efforts, cost lives, and move back the timeline for beginning to put people back to work. It also will likely increase already appalling racial disparities in who dies during the pandemic.

Governor Evers' relief proposal makes progress on free testing and treatment of COVID-19, mandating that all private health plans the state can regulate are forbidden from charging copays and deductibles, and limiting the extent to which insurers can cancel coverage for non-payment. It also gives the administration authority to open up BadgerCare to more uninsured Wisconsinites.



The Republican legislative plan does not include a mandate of free COVID-19 treatment for private health plans, which can average $10,000 to $20,000 dollars, more if the patient needs intensive care. It also fails to give the Governor the flexibility to fully leverage BadgerCare to expand health coverage during the emergency to uninsured Wisconsinites. In addition, the GOP plan does not limit the cancellation of health coverage during the pandemic, which will increase the ranks of the uninsured.

The failure of the Republican relief plan to make all COVID-19 treatment free, and provide the flexibility to extend BadgerCare to more uninsured Wisconites, will dramatically weaken the COVID-19 response and delay efforts to reopen the economy.

In a pandemic, the fear of financially crippling medical bills is a grave risk to the entire community because it discourages people from seeking care. A survey by Citizen Action and the Healthcare Value Hub found that nearly half of Wisconsinites have gone without needed medical care because of fear of the cost in the last year. A national study by the Commonwealth Fund found that 68% of Americans consider copays and deductibles important in determining whether or not they will seek COVID 19 treatment.

The overwhelming cost of health care, which is dangerous in normal times, is absolutely deadly during a pandemic because it is a barrier to universal testing and treatment needed to contain and isolate the virus. This is the only way to identify everyone who has been infected, and interrupt the deadly chains of disease transmission.

There is an overwhelming consensus among public health experts that we must have a massive testing and treatment program to contain this virus and to begin to reopen the economy. We need to start by testing and treating everyone with symptoms, and do contact tracing to isolate those who are infected. This must include testing community-wide to identify seemingly healthy people spreading the virus.

Critically, the failure to extend BadgerCare to the uninsured, will both make it much harder to contain the virus and further increase the documented Wisconsin racial disparities in infection and death rates.

We estimate based on modeling by the Economic Policy Institute that includes the people who lost coverage due to mass layoffs, there are now likely over 400,000 uninsured Wisconsinites. People of Color are substantially more likely to be uninsured. Guaranteeing free testing for those with health coverage, and leaving the uninsured on their own for testing and treatment, is likely to intensify morally repugnant racial disparities in COVID-19 deaths, while also undermining virus containment efforts.

“The COVID-19 pandeimic focuses us on the reality that we are all interconnected, and that leaving people out of our healthcare system risks the lives of everyone in the community,” said Robert Kraig, Executive Director of Citizen Action of Wisconsin. “Thousands of Wisconsinites who could otherwise have avoided infection may be needlessly put at risk if we don’t come together to assure that no one in Wisconsin delays or avoids treatment because they can’t afford the high cost of healthcare. A failure to eliminate the cost barrier to treatment also will cause ongoing economic carnage by forcing the state to continue to lock down huge sectors of the workforce.”

For more detail on Citizen Action of Wisconsin’s COVID-19 policy proposals, see a news release and memo to the Governor in March, and a column in early April.

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"One cannot make clear division between the innocent and the guilty. We are all involved, more or less, in the human, especially social, wrongs of our time." James Luther Adams