

MEDICAID

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States operate their own Medicaid programs but must follow rules from the federal government. Both state and federal governments pay for the program and set reimbursement rates.

Last month, the Republican-led U.S. House of Representatives approved House Resolution 1, or the “big, beautiful bill,” which includes reducing federal Medicaid spending by almost \$700 billion, as estimated by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO). Under the bill, about 10 million people would lose their health insurance coverage, the CBO estimated.

The intended — and unintended — outcomes of that bill worried the speakers, healthcare professionals, clients, and community members at the June 19 forum held at the Maquoketa Art Experience. Local group Operation Grassroots organized the forum to educate the public about local ramifications of the bill.

Six guest speakers explained the local effects the legislation would have, then answered questions from the audience for about 90 minutes. All agreed that if approved, the House bill would have a detrimental effect for everyone, not only those covered by Medicaid.

Panelists described the proposed Medicaid cuts as a continuous downward spiral affecting everyone and everything — from the Medicaid-insured receiving services to the privately insured, from services to staff, mental health to crime and housing.

Dr. Amanda River, director of the Jackson County Regional Health Center emergency department, sat in the audience and posed a pointed question to the panelists: “Do you think if this bill passes that it is going to cost people lives?”

Panelists answered with a resounding “yes.”

“People overdose. People have health conditions that are caused by their substance abuse, from their mental health, suicide,” Plank said. “There’s many things that may cause someone’s death, and untreated diseases that are treatable, that go untreated, they get worse over time and then drain the resources that we do have.”

Many people already must decide between food or medications, school supplies or a specialty doctor. Medicaid cuts would deepen that chasm, panelists said.

Hospital and pharmaceuticals

JCRHC provides healthcare for many Medicaid patients each year, according to Peters.

“Medicaid pays our hospital far less than the cost of caring for Medicaid patients,” the hospital administrator explained, “so there’s a difference that has to be made up.”

Prior legislation covers the Medicaid shortfall, which for JCRHC resulted in \$5.3 million this year and an estimated \$4.9 million next year.

“Your hospital is fine, it’s healthy today,” Peters quickly emphasized. “I don’t want anyone to worry about that.”

However, the House bill would further reduce Medicaid payments to Iowa hospitals, he explained. That would result in about 14,321 annual average hospital jobs lost across the state and about \$1.6 billion lost in economic activity across Iowa. Over the 10-year span of the bill, that equals about \$41 million less in federal, state and local tax revenue, Peters said.

On the pharmaceutical side, about 25% of Osterhaus Pharmacy patients receive Medicaid. Since at least 2013, Medicaid became the pharmacy’s top contracts for reimbursement, according to Dr. Kole Gallick, who has worked for the pharmacy for three years.



MSP photo by Kelly Gerlach

All panelists at a Medicaid forum in Maquoketa last week called proposed federal Medicaid cutbacks “detrimental” to communities, especial rural ones. Three panelists shown are, from left, Patrick Peters, Jackson County Regional Health Center administrator; Dr. Kole Gallick, Osterhaus Pharmacy; and Shirley Schneider, Area Substance Abuse Council.

Sometimes three months pass before a patient is approved for Medicaid coverage. The pharmacy does not deny those patients care, he said. Instead, the pharmacy holds the bills until eligibility is reached; then, the pharmacy applies for reimbursement. Gallick said increased access to services — not decreased, as he anticipates the House bill doing — is crucial for pharmacies.

Area Substance Abuse Council

The Area Substance Abuse Council serves a seven-county radius, including Jackson, and helps patients with prescription and illegal drug and alcohol abuse, among other services.

Almost half — 45% — of ASAC’s patients receive Medicaid coverage, according to representative Shirley Schneider. Another 12% are underinsured or uninsured.

“Having a majority of our source income through insurance reimbursement would definitely impact our ability to provide services in the first place in this community,” Schneider explained. She said the proposed bill would negatively affect safety, crime rates and the housing market and could potentially increase overdoses or deaths related to substance abuse.

“So, it’s important for people to receive treatment and have it local,” she said.

Senior citizens, special needs

Fear of eviction for the seniors she serves dominated Erica Wall’s remarks. She is the director of Clover Ridge Place assisted living facility in Maquoketa.

“... if your loved one was in an assisted living facility because you couldn’t care for them and they exhausted all of their funds living there, what’s your option then?” she asked. “Once those funds are exhausted, there’s very few places that are going to provide the care.”

Wall said her facility’s Medicaid reimbursement rate is “nowhere near what it actually takes to provide the care that we do, so this bill passing would be detrimental to any seniors” on Medicaid.

“And I think it touches a lot more people than anyone truly realizes... then there are people not able to see treatment for the problems that they’re having — whether social health, substance abuse — their whole family system is impacted as well,” Wall said.

Angela Petsche of Crescent Community Health Center in Dubuque and Plank feared the ramifications the House bill would have on the people they serve daily.

Crescent offers medical, dental, behavioral health, pharmacy, acute care, and more for 11,000 clients in Iowa, Wisconsin and

Illinois — 6,131 in Iowa.

“If these changes happen, we will see people with no insurance. We will see revenue drop, and then that’s going to reduce services and that’s going to reduce repayment. It’s just a snowball effect,” Petsche explained.

Her greatest fear remains people no longer receiving coverage; reapproval can take a month or two.

“So if I’m a person who may be having a surgery scheduled two months out, and all of a sudden I won’t have Medicaid, my surgery is canceled. I can’t have that done,” Wall explained. “So you know, it’s really going to be detrimental, but we’re going to figure it out, no matter what happens, and continue to serve everyone as much as we can.”

Imagine the Possibilities, headquartered in Maquoketa, serves more than 1,000 clients in 27 Iowa counties. Those services include group homes, independent living, 24/7 care, and hourly services.

“Our budget is \$75 million, ... and over 95% of that is Medicaid dollars,” Plank explained. “So losing Medicaid dollars, for us, means clients are not going to be seen.”

Imagine the Possibilities’ job coaching service puts special needs individuals into jobs in the community where they can earn money and integrate in the community. If the House bill passes, that program could be on the chopping block.

“This program already loses money,” Plank said. “So if we get funding cuts for employment services, which is the whole

purpose of trying to help, you know to get people on Medicaid working,” this program could be one of the first ones cut.

Insufficient Medicaid funding would further increase times on service waiting lists as well as limit access to essential supports, Plank said. It could force individuals with special needs back into institutions, she said.

“It undermines the progress that we’ve made for many years,” Plank said.

For Operation Grassroots member Lori Crouch, legislators compound the problem.

“Our legislators aren’t listening to us,” Crouch. “I haven’t heard one (local) person say they support this bill. Not one.”

Call to action

The House’s 215-214 affirmative vote transferred the bill to the Senate for consideration. If approved there, it would then return to the House for final approval.

In the meantime, last week’s Medicaid panelists urged attendees to contact their lawmakers to speak out against the proposed Medicaid changes.

“I have a moral obligation to give what I can and find the resources that it can to the people that don’t have anything,” Petsche said. “And I’m going to continue to do that, I continue to fight.”

But, everyone needs to speak up, Plank said.

“We need your help with this,” Plank urged. “We need the community’s help with this. We need to be talking to our senators right now... we need everybody. We need them to tell their story.”

Correction

The title of Valerie Gassman was incorrect in the June 18 EMS special section. Gassman is a paramedic. We regret the error.

PUBLIC BID NOTICE

2025 Individual Sidewalk Repair Work

The City of Maquoketa is now accepting sealed bids from contractors interested in bidding on sidewalk repair work around the City. For more complete bid information, please contact: **City Hall, 201 East Pleasant Street, Maquoketa, IA 52060 or call 563-652-2484.** Sealed bids marked “2025 Individual Sidewalk Repair Work” shall be **due by 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, July 3, 2025, at City Hall.**

The City reserves the right to reject all bids, quotes, either all or in part, waive informalities and make a decision that best suits the citizens of Maquoketa.

PUBLIC NOTICE

TWO VACANCIES ON EASTERN IOWA REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY COMMISSION

Jackson County has two openings on the Eastern Iowa Regional Housing Authority (EIRHA) Commission effective **September 1, 2025.** One appointment is for a two-year term and the other for a one-year term.

The Commissioners provide oversight of the Section 8 HCV (Housing Choice Voucher) program. The Supervisors are looking for individuals who are interested in housing, do not have rental properties on this program, and who are willing to attend up to six meetings per year in Dubuque.

Applications are available in the Supervisors office, **201 West Platt, Maquoketa, Iowa, or search for “Boards” on our website: <https://jacksoncounty.iowa.gov/>.**

Completed forms must be returned to the Supervisors office **by Friday, July 18, 2025.**

For details regarding the duties and responsibilities of an EIRHA Commissioner, contact Michelle Schnier, ECIA Director of Housing & Support Services, 563-556-4166, mschnier@ecia.org.