

Cook County launches effort to keep residents on Medicaid as thousands face losing coverage

Crain's Chicago Business

With Illinois facing the prospect of as many as 400,000 residents losing Medicaid in the next few years, Cook County Health has launched a campaign to keep people covered.

The effort by the county-led Medicaid Impact Workgroup is one of the first outreach programs in the state to address looming coverage losses due to re-enrollment and work requirement rules passed last year in the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

[Get Medicaid Facts](#) is a website and communications toolkit targeted at keeping enrollees, community groups, employers and health care providers up to date on how the new rules affect Medicaid eligibility.

Provisions of the federal spending act, also called H.R. 1, are projected to cut \$26 billion in Medicaid funds for Illinois over the next 10 years. Nationally, as much as \$1 trillion could be cut from Medicaid in that time. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has estimated [400,000 Illinoisans](#) could lose coverage by 2028.

“The health care provisions of H.R. 1 will bring widespread and complex shifts to the Medicaid program in the years to come, including more requirements customers must meet to be eligible for coverage and major financing changes that will put significant pressure on the state budget,” Illinois Department of Healthcare & Family Services Director Elizabeth M. Whitehorn said in a press release. “Mitigating the anticipated harm these federal changes will cause by helping customers navigate the new requirements to keep their coverage and working to ensure the Illinois Medicaid program can continue to cover as many critical healthcare services as possible are HFS’ top priorities.”

It’s still not clear how the Medicaid regulations will work, as federal guidance on exemptions and verification processes for work requirements aren’t expected until June.

Questions about what documentation enrollees will need, what constitutes proof of work, what counts as volunteering and more still need to be answered, officials say.

What is known is what H.R. 1 is meant to change.

The act calls for changing the federal definition of “qualified immigrants” to exclude previously eligible, lawfully present non-citizens from Medicaid coverage. Those losing eligibility include refugees, asylum-seekers and victims of domestic violence and trafficking.

Non-citizens who still qualify, CCH said, include children under 19, pregnant people, green card holders, those living in the U.S. for five-plus years, Cuban and Haitian immigrants, and Compact of Free Association migrants.

Those who qualify for health coverage because of Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act will be subject to new eligibility requirements, effective January 2027, including having to renew coverage every six months and demonstrate 80 hours per month of work, school or volunteering.

HFS, which manages the state Medicaid program, has said it is developing internal systems to comply with new requirements, including updating technical infrastructure and improving procedures and communication.

The agency also has initial [toolkit information on its website](#).

In the meantime, Get Medicaid Facts tools provide currently available details about the changes and gives enrollees steps to take to stay informed and connected.

First on the list is to stay enrolled now. The site emphasizes that, while changes don’t necessarily begin until October, Medicaid enrollees need to be sure they’re currently enrolled and that there’s not ambiguity about their contact information or where they live.

“Confusion about upcoming Medicaid changes is already leading people to lose coverage they are still eligible for, and that is a problem we can act on right now,” Alexandra Normington, chief communications and marketing officer at Cook County Health, said in a statement. “Get Medicaid Facts resources are designed to give people clear, practical steps they can take right now, and to also equip community partners with consistent, accurate information. The more we can

educate enrollees early and in a united way, the more people we can keep covered.”

The toolkit is largely unbranded, with FAQs; social media assets in English, Spanish and other languages; and links to information sources open to any user in Cook County, the rest of Illinois or even nationally. CCH intends to promote the campaign details to health care organizations nationwide.

In addition to public health departments, like CCH and the Chicago Department of Public Health, the toolkit is meant to reach Medicaid-eligible people where they are, she said, and can be used by health clinics, community organizations and businesses, particularly those who have a large number of part time workers, entry level workers or low-income employees who can qualify for Medicaid.

“All businesses have a vested interest in the well-being of their workforce. By engaging now, communicating consistently, and preparing for upcoming requirements, the business community can play a pivotal role in ensuring that eligible individuals remain covered and connected to care,” CCH CEO Dr. Erik Mikaitis said in a statement. “Beginning in January 2027, employer involvement will become even more critical. As work requirements and documentation mandates take effect, businesses will serve as key partners in helping employees maintain compliance.”

Workers, especially those in retail, food service, home health, child care, construction and landscaping, will need to verify hours worked or income. That process may be complex and employer who help provide timely and accurate documentation “can make the difference between workers maintaining coverage or falling through the cracks,” Mikaitis said.

Health officials say the requirements aren’t about cleaning up the eligibility rolls, but are artificially designed to unenroll people. That includes complex work requirements, said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle.

“H.R. 1 imposes more complex processes that demand significant funding, staffing and infrastructure yet provides local Medicaid agencies only months to prepare,” Preckwinkle said in the press release. “As we have seen in other states that implemented work requirements, these policies do not improve access. Instead, they create unnecessary red tape that makes it harder for eligible individuals to enroll and stay covered, which will ultimately leave hundreds of

thousands uninsured. I am proud that Cook County is collaborating with the state of Illinois to protect health coverage for as many residents as possible.”

Get Medicaid Facts grew out of the county’s Medicaid Impact Workgroup, convened by Mikaitis in September 2025 and comprised of representatives of organizations like HFS, CDPH, CCH and its Medicaid plan CountyCare, Erie Family Health Centers, Greater Chicago Food Depository, Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Illinois Association of Free & Charitable Clinics, Illinois Hospital Association, NAMI Chicago, UI Health and more.