

# Earned Media

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## Letter to the Editor Tip Sheet

During the next several months and beyond, ACS CAN and its partners will be working together to help the public, lawmakers and media see the importance of Medicaid in their communities. *Medicaid Covers Us* is a project to dispel misconceptions people have about the program and show the real people who, because of Medicaid, can access the care they need and, as a result, more fully engage with their families and thrive in their workplaces, schools and communities.

Keeping a media drumbeat is a critical component of our project to help people understand just how important Medicaid is for people who need it. While pitching events and other major moments to news outlets to get coverage is important, supplementing this work with letters to the editor is the best way to keep the issue in front of people and hear directly from those in their community about the importance of the program. Below is a guide to help identify powerful voices for letters to the editor and tips to help these spokespeople draft their own letters. Your volunteers' voices are important, and we hope the information below helps guide them through the process of sharing their story with their local media through letters.

If your volunteers' letters get published, please share them with us. We'd love to see their work in print!



## Potential Voices for Letters to the Editor

- ★ Medicaid recipient who can speak to what a difference the program has made for their health, quality of life, and ability to participate in their community.
- ★ Health care provider who can speak to what a difference they see Medicaid makes in the lives of their patients.
- ★ Health system/hospital leadership who can speak to how Medicaid helps their system/hospital thrive and continue serving the community; as well as provide jobs in the community.
- ★ Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) staff who can speak to how Medicaid helps keep their doors open, improve care coordination, and the quality of care delivered to patients.
- ★ Caregiver of someone on Medicaid who can speak to the services their loved one receives through Medicaid and what a difference it's making for them.
- ★ Social worker who can speak to what it's like helping people look for coverage, the challenges some individuals face who aren't able to access Medicaid because of low eligibility limits, or the benefits they've seen as eligibility for the program expands and more people are able to access care.
- ★ Patient or caregiver of someone dealing with a serious, chronic disease who can speak to how important it is to have access to care and how Medicaid makes that possible for so many individuals who would otherwise be forced to go without or make impossible financial decisions to access care.

## Tips for Drafting Letters To the Editor:

- ★ Watch length: Consider your word count—newspapers typically hold letters to the editor to a 150-250 word maximum, so be sure to check with the paper you're submitting the letter to ahead of time to make sure you're within the allowable word count.
- ★ Be you: What you bring to the discussion that no one else can is your personal story and how Medicaid impacts real people in your community. Briefly explain why Medicaid matters in the context of your personal story.
- ★ Get local: Remember to localize your letter. Editors are looking to show how bigger issues impact your local area.
- ★ Keep it simple: The person reading your letter once it's published may have never heard of this issue before, so write your letter as if you're explaining it to your neighbor for the first time. Avoid acronyms or “inside ballgame” type of language.

- ★ Pick one fact: Try to stick to one key fact. Because we're so passionate about this issue, you may have a lot of information you want to share on it. But if you give too many stats and facts, or facets of your story, they won't stick with your reader. Pick the one or two you think are the most powerful and make your case with those.
- ★ Submit once: Don't submit the same letter to multiple newspapers in the same market – editors don't like to see something from their paper printed in a competing paper and it may hurt your chances of getting published now and in the future.

## Letters To the Editor Messaging Points

The messaging section on page 4 of the toolkit covers ACS CAN's project messaging in depth, but below are a few shorter talking points that may make it easier to keep your letter brief.

- ★ Medicaid is a health insurance program for low-income children and adults, seniors, and people with disabilities.
- ★ This program makes it possible for low-income children and adults to see a doctor when they're sick, get regular check-ups, buy medications and access preventive care like cancer screenings.
- ★ Medicaid health insurance helps people manage serious illnesses, including diabetes and cancer.
- ★ Having health insurance through Medicaid helps kids manage chronic issues like asthma or vision problems so they can succeed in school.
- ★ Medicaid supports low-wage workers who cannot get health insurance through their workplace.
- ★ Medicaid provides temporary help for people who lose a job or become too sick to work.
- ★ Medicaid offers families the peace of mind knowing that if one of them gets sick or needs to go to the hospital, they won't be forced to choose between paying medical bills and paying rent or putting food on the table.
- ★ Medicaid makes it possible for local hospitals, clinics, doctors, and schools to provide health services in their community.
- ★ Medicaid covers our senior neighbors on fixed incomes. Medicaid covers the waiter or waitress at our favorite restaurants. Medicaid covers low-income children attending school with our kids. Medicaid helps keep the doors at our local hospital open and our doctors and nurses employed. Medicaid covers our community. *Medicaid Covers US.*