



Protecting Medicaid Expansion in Idaho: **A Storybook**





Introduction

In 2018, Idahoans voted to expand access to affordable, quality health care. Since then, thousands of state residents have the peace of mind that comes with being able to get the care they need, when they need it. The stories that follow show the transformative and lifesaving impact Medicaid expansion has had for our friends, neighbors, and communities in recent years. Through the tumultuous height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Idahoans could rely on stable health care when it was most needed. Everyday Idahoans, like the people in this book, are relying on their lawmakers to protect Medicaid expansion.



Melody | Blackfoot

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Medicaid was literally a lifesaver for me. It was there when I needed it most.

After 20 years as a Certified Nursing Assistant, Melody started dealing with back problems so severe, she could no longer do her job. Unfortunately leaving her job meant she also lost her employer-sponsored health insurance. Her husband's job as a farm mechanic doesn't come with health insurance, leaving them with few options for affordable health coverage at a time when they needed it most. The family ended up purchasing a plan on the marketplace, but the high deductible and plan's limitations crushed them financially. After Medicaid expansion was implemented in Idaho, Melody and her husband qualified for Medicaid and they immediately felt a world of difference.

Medicaid fully covered multiple surgeries for Melody, and her health and quality of life have greatly improved as a result.

She has her mobility back and no longer needs prescription medications to manage her conditions. She is able to care for her teenage son, who has a medical condition that led to multiple hospitalizations and a surgery. Melody's husband was able to see a doctor to diagnose his rheumatoid arthritis, and now has the medication he needs to be able to work.

When continuous coverage protections ended in the spring of 2023, Melody's family lost their Medicaid coverage. The family is now back on an expensive marketplace plan because it covers her husband's essential medication. They are making it work, but miss the peace of mind and financial support Medicaid provided during a period of serious health challenges. Melody feels strongly that Medicaid expansion saved her life.



Megan & Peter | Meridian

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Medicaid has been one of our greatest blessings while Peter is in medical school. Having health coverage for ourselves and our toddler in this phase of life means so much to us. We're calling on Idaho lawmakers to keep Medicaid accessible for other families like ours.

Megan and her husband have firsthand experience understanding the importance of health care. As a medical student, Peter is learning how critical preventative care, screenings, and treatments are – none of which his patients would be able to get if they can't afford to see a doctor.

Megan cares for their two-year-old son, runs her own photography business, and is active in their church and community. Even with Megan's income and Peter's job as a Teaching Assistant, they cannot afford private health insurance for

their family. When Idaho expanded Medicaid, the family was able to enroll in comprehensive coverage through Medicaid. And now, thanks to Medicaid, the family is able to get the medical care they need, without the fear of racking up medical debt on top of student loans. Medicaid is a stepping stone to the next phase of their lives. Megan and Peter know how much of a blessing Medicaid has been to them, and hope lawmakers will protect Medicaid expansion so the program can continue to be available for families like theirs.



GiGi and Tony | Boise

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Medicaid expansion has made the difference for our family—and for many of my clients. Now we’re all able to get the care we need.

GiGi Huntley is a small business owner who lives in Boise with her Veteran husband Tony and two children. GiGi lived without health insurance for eight years, but she’s grateful that her daughter was covered through Medicaid. At one point, her daughter needed an ambulance – and because of Medicaid, they only had a small copay.

Medicaid expansion came at the perfect time for the Huntleys. GiGi qualified for affordable health coverage as a result, and was able to get physical therapy to manage the pain she’s been dealing with so she can continue her work as a hairdresser. She and her husband, a barber, have had the same clientele for years – and many of them are on fixed incomes. They’ve seen firsthand how important Medicaid and

Medicare have been for the clients they work with every day.

Tony was recently diagnosed with prostate cancer and while he receives much of his care through the VA, he also regularly sees a specialist who is not covered by the VA. Medicaid helps fill the gaps in the VA coverage so the family can be confident Tony is receiving the best possible cancer treatment.

As a family, the Huntleys enjoy spending time doing outdoor activities together. After Medicaid expansion, they can enjoy Idaho’s great outdoors without fear, because they now have the comfort of knowing they have quality, affordable health insurance.



Carol | Nampa

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A simple surgery is only simple if you can afford to get it. I might not be here today if not for Medicaid.

Carol works part time as a home health care worker. She enjoys her job, her clients, and likes being able to make a difference by caring for others in their homes. But, like many Idahoans, Carol’s employer doesn’t offer any health benefits. Because of this, Carol fell into the Medicaid coverage gap, with no options for affordable health insurance. She was forced to live without health coverage for many years, relying on a community health center for annual screenings and when she needed to see a doctor.

When Idaho expanded Medicaid, Carol gained health coverage. During a routine test, she found out she was in the early

stages of cancer. Carol was terrified, but her doctor assured her that a “simple surgery” would prevent the cancer from developing further. After years without health coverage, Carol was relieved that she could now afford this surgery thanks to Medicaid. If her diagnosis had happened earlier, she wouldn’t have been able to pay for it.

Carol had the surgery and is now cancer free and her potentially life-saving cancer screenings and treatment, speciality care, and mental health services are all covered. Carol is an example of how Medicaid expansion is helping Idahoans get and stay healthy.



Rebecca and Jeremy | Boise

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Thanks to Medicaid we knew our family was cared for, and Jeremy could focus on looking for work. I thank God every day that this safety net was there for us during difficult times.

When Jeremy lost his job in February of 2020, he also lost his health insurance. As a type one diabetic, his biggest fear was how he'd be able to access the insulin his life depends on. His wife, Rebecca, was able to pay for the basics for their family through her job teaching English online, but they rely on two incomes to support their kids. During this difficult time, with a job search at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Medicaid was there for Jeremy,

Rebecca, and their kids. Medicaid meant the kids could go to the doctor for their regular checkups and Jeremy could get the insulin he needed. Now, Rebecca has a job in the tech industry that provides health insurance for her family while Jeremy is training for a career in cybersecurity. Medicaid expansion helps Idaho families like theirs get back on their feet during tough times.



Shayne* | Boise

**The storyteller's name has been changed for privacy purposes.*

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Before Medicaid, life was miserable. But now that I'm covered, I can afford the surgery I need that could give me my life back, without worrying about putting myself deep into debt.

Shayne has suffered from Dystonia since she was 15. It's a neurological disorder that causes abnormal muscle spasms, twisting, and tremors, and over the past few years her condition has progressed. Like many Idahoans, her job was impacted due to the pandemic, and her income decreased significantly. Luckily, Shayne was able to enroll in Medicaid since Idaho had expanded the program.

Before she was covered by Medicaid, Shayne had spent over \$30,000 on various treatments. In the year since Shayne enrolled in Medicaid, she has had access to new treatments, without forcing her to choose between her health and her finances. Shayne is moving forward with a surgery that doctors feel could alleviate her symptoms. Getting the surgery gives her hope for the future and would be out of reach if she didn't have Medicaid.