

OPINION

It Seems to Me: Medicaid a concern

By Tricia Thompson

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Residents in the Eau Claire area and millions across the country who care about Medicaid are holding their breath this week. Our congressional representatives have returned to Washington with the promise to once again try and pass the American Health Care Act – the bill that would repeal Obamacare.

Most people think of Medicaid as health insurance for poor people. Many don't realize in the 3rd Congressional District, 181,262 individuals are enrolled in Medicaid. It provides funding for more than 20 programs, such as school-based services and supports like speech therapy.

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It's hard to know for certain what specific changes have been made behind closed doors, but we are certain the new version will include some version of per-capita caps or block grants to Medicaid. Best guess estimates show Wisconsin losing \$1 billion over the next 10 years (tinyurl.com/ma8k6o5).

Our local group, 3rd District Medicaid Advocates, is extremely concerned about the next version of the American Health Care Act. There are individuals like Deb from Eau Claire, who retired early in order to take care of her 18-year-old daughter who requires 24-hour care. Without the support of Medicaid, her daughter would not have the support she needs to live at home. According to the Survival Coalition of Wisconsin, a coalition of more than 340 disability groups, Medicaid provides \$5 billion dollars in Wisconsin – through reimbursement to doctors, dentists and hospitals, and payment to direct care providers and other related services.

No one should be forced to decide between having assistance with personal care in order to go to work or remaining in a nursing home and unemployed. Schools that are already struggling with providing supports and services to children with disabilities could be forced to make additional cuts. The impact of a large reduction in Medicaid funding will place our state legislators and governor in a difficult position of having to decide how to make major cuts in benefits, limit eligibility or eliminate programs entirely.

House Republicans have made it clear they want to repeal Obamacare – paying for this goal with across the board cuts to the critical and complex Medicaid programs that support our most vulnerable populations is

short-sighted and ultimately extremely dangerous. It is imperative that all of us help educate legislators and Wisconsin residents about the critical role Medicaid plays in your life as well as in our state economy. We urge you to take a few moments to contact your federal legislators (<https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials/>).

Thompson, of Menomonie, is a member of 3rd District Medicaid Advocates.

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