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Medicaid Block Grants Mean Low-Income Older Adults Could Lose Benefits

WASHINGTON – Based on of its long experience ensuring that states do not limit eligibility and benefits, the National Senior Citizens Law Center says that the result of block granting Medicaid would mean taking health care coverage away from millions of low-income older adults and people with disabilities.

“Our experience has shown that states, if given free rein, intend to serve fewer people by restricting access and benefits,” said NSCLC Executive Director Paul Nathanson. “We have fought for years to ensure that states do not ignore Medicaid law.”

In a Policy Issue Brief entitled [“Medicaid Block Grants: Attacking the Safety Net for Low-Income Older Adults,”](#) NSCLC shows that the courts were needed to stop state attempts to cut costs through changing eligibility or benefits mandated by federal Medicaid law. To prove the point, NSCLC cites several cases that show how states, even when subject to legal constraints, have sought to circumvent Medicaid law. In these case examples, the states have:

- Denied eligibility to grandparents raising grandchildren
- Prevented people from filing applications or pressured them to withdraw their applications
- Created waiting lists seven years long to access home and community based benefits
- Sought to take away coverage from people residing in nursing homes by changing the medical need standard
- Set reimbursement rates for prescription drugs below costs so that people could not get their medications

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- Tried to be exempted from implementing the nursing home reform law
- Sought to cut adult day care services for people who are eligible for Medicare and Medicaid
- Ignored spousal impoverishment rules and denied services to a disabled, low-income spouse of a nursing home resident
- Offered beneficiaries a wheelchair, but would not pay for the battery needed to operate it

“Proposals to block grant Medicaid, which is a shared federal/state program in which the federal government currently sets the rules and shares costs with the states, should set off alarm bells for low-income, older adults, their families and advocates,” the report states. “There is clear evidence that, given the opportunity, states will not provide an adequate safety net.”

Medicaid is not only a program for low-income older adults. It provides coverage for nearly 9 million people over age 65, including middle class individuals who have impoverished themselves with long-term care benefits. It also covers 8 million people with disabilities under age 65 as well as 29.5 million children and 15 million low-income adults. Close to half of all Medicaid beneficiaries are members of ethnic or racial minorities.

The National Senior Citizens Law Center is a non-profit organization whose principal mission is to protect the rights of low-income older adults. Through advocacy, litigation, and the education and counseling of local advocates, we seek to ensure the health and economic security of those with limited income and resources, and access to the courts for all. For more information, visit our Web site at www.NSCLC.org.

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