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[00:00:39] **Speaker 1** Nationally and here in Wisconsin, possible cuts to the health care program known as Medicaid have sparked fear in the low-income families, elderly residents, and people with disabilities who depend on it. At a public hearing in West Dallas, lawmakers on the state legislature's Joint Finance heard from many about why Medicaid needs to be saved.

[00:01:01] **Speaker 2** Medicaid programs allow persons with disabilities to live a dignified life. Medicaid really supports a healthy Wisconsin. We have about half a million children in Wisconsin covered by Medicaid, which is about a third of Wisconsin's kids.

[00:01:16] **Speaker 3** People are going to lose their insurance, rural and low-income hospitals will close, and people will die.

[00:01:24] **Speaker 1** Impassioned public testimony on Medicaid before the State Budget Writing Committee and now that Congress has passed its budget blueprint, work begins in earnest in Washington to enact major tax cuts paid for with sharp reductions in federal programs that could hit the health care program. As to Medicaid in Wisconsin, we turn to Bobby Peterson, Executive Director of ABC for Health, a non-profit public interest law firm. helping consumers navigate the healthcare system. And Bobby, nice to see you again.

[00:01:55] **Speaker 4** Thanks for inviting me.

[00:01:56] **Speaker 1** So one point that you really want to make clear is that Cups to Medicaid have not happened yet. With that in mind, what's your guidance?

[00:02:04] **Speaker 4** Well, I think it's, you know, don't panic, but let your voice be heard. I mean, Wisconsin, people know that Medicaid is a very important program. It covers one in five people in our state. So that's families, friends, neighbors, a lot of folks out there that have potentially affected by this. But it hasn't changed yet. And there's opportunities to help influence the process, hopefully make it better and to avoid some of the serious. issues that we're concerned about and worried about, but I think we're gonna do our best to try and stave them off.

[00:02:38] **Speaker 1** So what kinds of coverage does Medicaid represent?

[00:02:42] **Speaker 4** It covers long-term care for seniors. It covers people with disabilities. It covers a lot of kids on BadgerCare Plus, some parents, childless adults. So it's broad and wide. And so I think if you, most of our viewers will know someone who is getting Medicaid services. This affects every corner of the state.

[00:03:04] **Speaker 1** Why are people sounding the alarm on potential cuts? Is that overstated?

[00:03:09] **Speaker 4** No, I think it's important. And even though it's characterized sometimes as we're not going to cut the benefits, just putting procedural hoops and hurdles in the path of people, we've seen this before. We see it even now, and it could get worse. So bureaucratic red tape blockages to coverage, just making it harder for people to navigate these systems without effective strategies to help people through that system is the problem.

[00:03:38] **Speaker 1** As you say, the Trump administration and GOP leaders say they will not cut Medicaid benefits. They're going after waste, fraud, and abuse. But you were just talking about bureaucratic kind of red tape. What could they do around eligibility requirements or other things like that to affect reduction?

[00:03:58] **Speaker 4** Well, for example, they could put in work requirements for certain Medicaid programs. And it's just the process, the paperwork, getting through it. People that may be ill, may not be able to work. Just going through that process deters people, knocks them off to the side. They lose coverage, and they're not getting important health care and coverage that they need, with the consequence of running up medical bills and medical debt, which is something that we really want to try and avoid.

[00:04:26] **Speaker 1** Now Wisconsin, as you know, never expanded Medicaid and expanded Medicaid gave state, the feds gave states 90% of those costs. Wisconsin never expanded it, so our share from the fed's is 60%. But with any reductions to Medicaid, could it still blow up, you know kind of the state budget?

[00:04:47] **Speaker 4** I mean, I think that it depends what Wisconsin, how we react to it, you know. But I think for the most part, it's going to be a situation where people are going to face most of the pain, not the budget as much. Because I think a lot of folks out there are going to deterred from getting the care and services that they need. Their conditions will worsen, their health will worson, and their medical debt will accumulate.

[00:05:15] **Speaker 1** So, if there are cuts, what are the implications to even those not covered by Medicaid when it comes to things like uncompensated care and hospitals, rural hospitals?

[00:05:26] **Speaker 4** Sure, I mean, they're under stress already. Rural hospitals are under stress. We've seen closures, rising levels of uncompensated care make it untenable for them to continue operations in some levels, because it's just, you know, they're not meeting their bottom line and they can't provide the services that they need. Rural hospital are on very thin margins, most of them. We know that in Wisconsin, in 2023, the last year, that data is available. There was $1.4 billion in uncompenseated care. That's a lot, but that's gonna go up. And it's gonna affect more people with more bills and unpaid bills, it's going to affect hospitals with unpaid bill, that's a system issue. And these are consequences of making Medicaid more difficult, more challenging, more bureaucratic hoops, getting in the way of people that need the care and coverage and getting some of those bills paid.

[00:06:17] **Speaker 1** And what does it mean, apart from uncompensated care to hospitals, to people who are not on Medicaid but otherwise covered by other health care?

[00:06:28] **Speaker 4** Yeah, it's another one of the long-term effects with its cost shifting so if we think about you know I mean people talk sometimes about Socialized medicine I talked sometimes about socialized medical debt, so if you think about all that debt That's unpaid. It doesn't just go away, but it gets spread out in the system to everybody else So we all have a price to pay when people don't have adequate coverage When hospitals can't get the bills paid and so it's an important issue for us all to think about You don't to say it well. I'm not a Medicaid. I shouldn't worry it's going to affect you at some level and it's gonna affect a family, friend or a neighbor most likely.

[00:07:02] **Speaker 1** All right, Bobby Peterson, thanks very much. Five not that you you were great, but it just I felt like that

[00:07:17] **Speaker 4** Maybe it's. We were probably 10 to 20 seconds over.

[00:07:22] **Speaker 1** I get these time kids, right? And the time cards just didn't, but maybe it's just me.

[00:07:30] **Speaker 4** Thanks for reporting on this issue. I think it's an important one. I think, you know, it's going to, people hopefully, you know, the takeaway message is going to be, it's affecting everyone in Wisconsin at some level. Yeah.

[00:07:41] **Speaker 1** Yes, well, we will see what happens. Yeah, okay. Good talking to you. Thank you. Careful, especially on this.