

Medicaid Expansion Saves Lives & Reduces Disparities

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PROBLEM

With only 12 states left to expand Medicaid, the issue of affordable healthcare access largely plagues Southern states that stubbornly refuse to close the coverage gap. Southern states have the highest rates for [chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, and staggering rates of poverty](#) and health disparities that can be traced back to Jim Crow and slavery. Southerners are more likely to report having poorer health compared to their neighbors in the Midwest or in the North. Tragically, infant mortality rates in the South are the highest in the nation, as are cancer death rates. Compared to the rest of the nation, [Southerners are more likely to be uninsured than any other region in the U.S.](#)

The pandemic shows us that Southerners are not safe from infection, complications and death from COVID-19. In a region home to many people of color, in particular Black Americans, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacted a staggering toll on Black communities. Black and Latinx communities have been [overrepresented in COVID-19 infections and deaths](#) in the South. Black Americans and Latinx people are more likely to be essential workers on the frontlines of the pandemic and less likely to be uninsured. Without the luxury of working from home, communities of color in the South have been hit particularly hard by COVID-19. Locked out of coverage even before the pandemic, [essential workers in non-expansion states have battled untreated pre-existing conditions for years](#), increasing their risk for complications and deaths from COVID-19.

SOLUTION: EXPAND MEDICAID

Expanding Medicaid is the quickest way for Southern states to close racial disparities in health access and coverage, boost their economies during this economic downturn and narrow the rural and urban gap in accessing health care.

- Expanding Medicaid in the Southern non-expansion states would pave a **pathway to affordable healthcare for nearly [seven million Southerners](#)**. More than half of these Southerners are [people of color](#). By expanding Medicaid in the South, essential workers such as cashiers or gas station attendants could finally access lifesaving care.
- Expanding Medicaid would also lead to a substantial economic boost for the South due to the enhanced match from the federal government. Medicaid expansion also [saves states significant dollars from reductions in uncompensated care and boosts state tax revenues from increased economic activity spurred by the infusion of federal dollars](#).
- Expansion benefits would have a disproportionate positive effect for rural economies that rely on Medicaid more than their urban counterparts. In the eight Southern states that have yet to expand Medicaid, **[almost 50 rural hospitals](#) have shuttered their doors since 2014**. Closures of rural hospitals lead to a downward spiral for the community and economy further widening the rural and urban gap.