



SOUTHERNERS *for* MEDICAID EXPANSION

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Racial, Health Equity Leaders Call on U.S Senate to Close Medicaid Gap For Good

Today leaders on race and health equity across the nation [called on Democratic Senators](#) to close the Medicaid coverage gap once and for all. Nearly 400 organizations from across the nation signed a joint letter urging leaders to support the House version of coverage gap policy in the Build Back Better bill, which calls for a permanent and comprehensive fix to the coverage gap.

“When you deny health care to the poorest and neediest people, we are talking about something akin to political murder,” says Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, Co-Chair of the Poor People’s Campaign. “We need every legislator to take a moral inventory and move towards a health care system where every American can get health care, no matter their race, income, or zip code.”

Americans in the coverage gap are those who don’t qualify for Medicaid under their state’s rules even while living under the poverty level—which means they also make too little to receive financial help to purchase coverage on the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Marketplace. More than sixty percent are Black, Latino, Indigenous, and Asian.

“The Medicaid coverage gap leaves more than 600,000 Latinos with no meaningful pathway to affordable health insurance,” says Eric Rodriguez, Senior Vice President of Policy and Advocacy at UnidosUS. “State leaders have failed to act on Medicaid expansion even amid a national health crisis that has disproportionately impacted Latinos and other people of color. Congress must deliver a permanent and comprehensive coverage gap solution through the recovery package being developed now.”

The letter recalls the history of Medicaid, connecting it to the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. Since its inception, states have made Medicaid decisions, which allowed former slave states to deny health care to large segments of Black communities—an agenda still reflected in Southern states’ Medicaid policies today.

Eight of the twelve remaining states that have not expanded Medicaid are in the South.

“The Satcher Health Leadership Institute at Morehouse School of Medicine (SHLI-MSM) believes that there’s nothing more critical to achieving Health Equity than ‘equality of access to healthcare services,’” says Dr. David Satcher, MD, PhD, Founder of the Satcher Health Leadership Institute and 16th Surgeon General of the United States. “The Affordable Care Act (ACA) has been a major step in that direction. But even so, many states refused to expand Medicaid and therefore did not take advantage of the opportunity of extending healthcare, and thus enriching health equity.”

“We know our states all too well, and if we want to build a nation where everyone can get health care coverage regardless of their race, income, or where they live, we need bold action from Congress,” says Derrick Johnson, President and CEO of the NAACP.

This is the only health care priority in the Build Back Better bill that directs resources to low-income Americans and communities of color, and the only one aimed to cover people who have no other pathway to coverage. Advocates stressed that Congress cannot settle for a plan where coverage lapses in a few years or leaves anyone behind.

“The time to act is now,” says Melanie Campbell, President and CEO of the national Black Women’s Roundtable. “Congress might not have an opportunity to close the coverage gap for years, if not decades. We can’t take that risk and allow our communities to continue suffering.”

The letter follows calls to close America’s coverage gap for good from [national civil rights groups](#), [advocacy](#) from the Congressional Black Caucus and Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and [a joint statement](#) led by major foundations.

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