

# Opioids Are Destroying West Virginia's Health

## Medicaid Presents a Life-Saving Solution for Affected Youth of All Ages

**As law enforcement leaders in West Virginia, we witness every day more and more of our youth being affected by the devastating opioid epidemic. Medicaid provides vital services for one third of our nation's opioid-addicted individuals, from critical care for newborns exposed in utero to helping addicted teenagers gain sobriety. West Virginia's Medicaid program has taken several steps to reduce the epidemic's ultimate impact on our state's children.<sup>1</sup>**

West Virginia experienced an average of 51 Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) babies born per 1,000 live births in 2017, with more than 100 NAS babies born per 1,000 in Lincoln and Marshall counties.<sup>2</sup> To reduce incidences of NAS in West Virginia, the state utilizes Medicaid funding to administer its Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Program, which identifies pregnant women with opioid-use disorders and provides them with prenatal and post-delivery care, including access to substance abuse treatment. Between 2014 and 2016, 50 West Virginian mothers successfully completed the program and prevented their babies from being born with NAS.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, **almost 500 children nationwide under the age of 6 were treated for opioid ingestion in 2015**, two thirds of which received

Medicaid-funded treatment.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the increasingly high number of youth who end up in foster care due to their parents' substance abuse often receive Medicaid-funded physical and mental health services that mitigate the trauma of growing up in a drug-ridden home.<sup>5</sup> In West Virginia, the proportion of youth in foster care **increased 61 percent from June 2011 to June 2018**, thus Medicaid is crucial to provide these youth with the services they need to overcome their traumatic past.<sup>6</sup>

To assist in reducing opioid usage among teenagers, Medicaid provides a comprehensive array of prevention, diagnostic, and treatment

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services to schools, through the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) and the Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) programs. West Virginia's Medicaid also provides crucial treatment to youth who have become addicted to opioids through its Comprehensive Opioid Addiction Treatment (COAT) model, which pairs youth who are misusing opioids with medical and psychosocial treatment to assist them on their path to sobriety.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Medicaid provides a range of services to West Virginia youth of all ages to reduce this

epidemic's ultimate impact. As law enforcement officials, we have seen firsthand how Medicaid is an indispensable tool in our fight against the opioid epidemic and getting our youth on a path to success. Limiting access to this powerful resource would decrease the amount of services available to children and youth impacted by the epidemic, which, in turn, could potentially increase death by overdose. West Virginia's government should not impose additional barriers or restrict access to Medicaid to ensure that those affected by opioid addiction can access needed treatment and care.

**1** Medicaid.gov. (2018, February). Medicaid and CHIP total enrollment in February 2018; The Children's Partnership. (2017). Medicaid: On the front lines of the opioid epidemic impacting children in California.

**2** West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. (2018). DHHR Releases Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Data for 2017.

**3** Aetna. (2016). Aetna better health of West Virginia.

**4** Kane, J., Colvin, J., Bartlett, A., Hall, M. (2018, March). Opioid-related critical care resource use in US children's hospitals. *Pediatrics*, 141(4).

**5** Medicaid and CHIP Payment Access Commission. (2015, June). The intersection of Medicaid and child welfare.

**6** West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. (2018, July 31). Foster Care Replacements Report.

**7** SAMHSA. (2015, January 26). Coverage of behavioral health services for youth with substance use disorders.

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1212 New York Avenue NW / Suite 300 / Washington, DC 20005 / 202.464.7005



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