

A: FRONT

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Thousands in Colorado face losing Medicaid

Tighter eligibility part of 'big, beautiful bill'

Translate

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An estimated 5,000 documented immigrants living in Colorado will lose access to Medicaid starting Thursday under one of the first major changes to come from H.R. 1, the federal legislation known as the "big, beautiful bill."

The new restrictions will apply to refugees; people granted asylum or "humanitarian parole," including Afghans who resettled after aiding U.S. military operations; members of Native American tribes who were born in Canada; and those allowed to live in the United States because they are victims of domestic violence or human trafficking.

The Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing initially estimated about 5,000 people across the state would lose coverage this week but did not provide a more specific number by deadline Tuesday.

Green card holders, people from Pacific islands in the Compact of Free Association and certain Cuban and Haitian immigrants will still qualify, as will legally present children and pregnant or postpartum adults who fall into one of the now-ineligible categories.

Undocumented immigrants generally aren't eligible for Medicaid, although Colorado has opted to cover children and pregnant adults. State lawmakers decided to limit the number of children who could enroll in the program and to drop expensive services, such as long-term care for kids with disabilities, to help close the state's billion-dollar budget gap this session.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that dropping Medicaid coverage for the affected immigrant groups would save about \$6.2 billion nationwide over 10 years, while leaving about 100,000 people without insurance.

The cuts are part of the Republican spending bill's substantive changes to the nation's healthcare and federal food assistance programs. The shifts are set to chisel more than \$1 trillion from the programs as fewer people are enrolled, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

While a few states have begun imposing the bill's Medicaid work requirement this year, most will launch in 2027. The CBO has estimated more than 7 million people will be without health insurance from the Medicaid changes. The bill adds a \$50 billion fund to help rural hospitals handle the cuts.

Most patients in the immigrant and refugee mental health program on the University of Colorado's Anschutz Medical Campus rely on Medicaid, clinical director Fardus Ahmed said Tuesday.

Refugees typically have experienced significant trauma, such as persecution and displacement from their homes, as well as the difficulties of rebuilding their lives in a different culture, all of which contribute to mental health needs, she said.

Staffers at CU Anschutz are working with patients to figure out if they should continue to qualify for Medicaid and, if not, to link them to free or low-cost community providers, Ahmed said.

But a share of people may not be able to quickly find a new provider, and others may not make as much progress with a provider who doesn't know their culture, she said.

Medicaid contributes to people's stability by allowing them to access physical and mental health care when they need it, Ahmed said. The change "is already causing significant fear and anxiety among our patients," she said.