

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Remarks at Harborview Protect Medicaid Press Conference

March 18th, 2025

[[VIDEO](#)]

Sen. Cantwell: Well, thank you, Sommer, for allowing us to be here at Harborview Hospital today, and thank you Dr. Palazzo and Dr. Deen, and Yi-Hui, thank you so much. McKenzi, thank you for describing the harrowing fight that you've had to face and advocating for others, and Whitney and Malachi, thank you so much for joining us. We really appreciate it.

We're here today because we are fighting to protect Medicaid. We are here because there have been devastating proposals put on the table that would cut Medicaid significantly. Washingtonians, as you just heard, rely on this system to help us provide good care.

Right now, in the House of Representatives, they have been directed by their leadership to find an \$880 billion cut to Medicaid. When you stop and think about this and the accounts that we're talking about that are also lumped in here, [93%] of the [non-Medicare] money in those accounts come from Medicaid.

Even if you cut the other accounts, the 7% that's left -- which I don't support because it's the Children's Health Insurance Program, the Universal Service Fund, and a variety of other programs -- even if you got rid of all those other 7%, you would still be having a massive cut to Medicaid.

CEO Sommer [Kleweno-Walley] said it best, "This is a massive cut that is being proposed." This is a tsunami of cuts coming at the people of Washington and the United States of America, and I guarantee you this is not a drill. We need everyone to call their member of Congress and the White House and say, this level of massive cut to Medicaid is not what we want. It is not sustainable. It's not even practical.

Are they really trying to decimate Medicaid with this level of funding cuts? Are they at the last minute going to say they're going to block grants, like they said before, which we also know means a massive cut to Harborview. I think last time we were here, 10 plus years ago, it would have made critical cuts, even if they came up with that proposal. That is why last month, I released a snapshot report depicting the impacts of Medicaid on our state's health care system, and today we're releasing another snapshot report that shows how these cuts would significantly impact Seattle and Western Washington.

The bottom line is, nearly 2 million people in our state are on Apple Health and our state Medicaid plan. When we expanded the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid expansion, we added hundreds of thousands of Washingtonians that got better access to care and helped drive down health care costs by not having these people show up in uncompensated care at our hospitals.

The new report found that Medicaid funded \$3.3 billion worth of hospital care in Washington state. So our hospitals, like Harborview, Seattle Children's, Fred Hutch, Evergreen, and many others rely on that payment. The report also shows that Medicaid will hit Washington's blue-collar families the hardest. In Federal Way, Burien, SeaTac, and Kent areas, more than 70% of children get their health care coverage through Medicaid.

So these programs help not only children, but pregnant women, people with disabilities, our nursing home care, our seniors, and it also pays for substance abuse related to our fentanyl crisis. So all of these Washingtonians need and count on this program.

People who don't have affordable health insurance obviously end up in the emergency room. So helping a hospital like Harborview survive, because they get some payment through the Medicaid system, has been a good solution.

There is data that shows, from Astria Toppenish Hospital, that 76% of their patients are on Medicaid and Medicare, a larger percentage than the state average overall. But financial difficulties have already forced hospitals to close [some services] and make the challenge even greater.

We don't want these facilities to close and have more people come to Seattle to rely on that care, but our report also shows how neighborhood clinics also rely on Medicaid. Sea Mar Community Health, just down the road here, has locations across the state, and even a 25% cut of Medicaid would mean over \$92 million in losses and probably force about six hundred job cuts.

So, these clinics are critical to delivering vaccines. Sea Mar, for example, in 2024, delivered [over] 160,000 vaccines to Washingtonians. We are seeing preventable measles cases increasing. We need our vaccines. It's now not the time to be defunding Medicaid at any of these institutions.

Over the past several months, I've heard from pediatricians, OB/GYN's, cancer survivors, and countless other advocates who worry about what a cut to Medicaid would mean, and so, we are not going to stand by.

I think they think we're confused by the math. But if you're giving a congressional committee the direction to cut [...] Medicaid, I don't know how else we can think about it, other than to say it's an assault on an essential program.

We need to stand up and fight. We need to tell people that Medicaid is a lifesaving program that has been successful. It has helped us reduce the uncompensated care costs, and it has given people like Malachi and like McKenzi hope, and it's helped these great institutions continue to provide great care. Thank you.