

Sample Talking Points

MYTH: “No coverage is better than Medicaid.”

Background: *In the fight over the Affordable Care Act, one of the most frequently-deployed arguments was that Medicaid enrollees were more likely to suffer worse health outcomes than the uninsured. These arguments on the right side of the political aisle are largely pegged to a University of Virginia study highlighted by Avik Roy of Forbes in 2011, which found that surgical patients on Medicaid are 13 percent more likely to die than those without insurance of any kind. The study was large in scale and normalized the results for age, gender, income, geographic region, operation, and 30 background diseases; however, it only rested on surgical outcomes and ignored a large body of work that found better outcomes for those covered by the Medicaid program.*

Health coverage through the Medicaid program improves the health and lives of those whom it covers.

- The conclusion that it’s better to go uninsured than receive coverage through Medicaid can only be reached through a very selective reading of the health literature.
- Several studies have found consistently beneficial effects of insurance coverage on health across a wide range of outcomes and conditions, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes, HIV infection, depression, respiratory illnesses, and traumatic injuries.¹
- The IOM estimates that 22,000 people died because they did not have health insurance in 2006.² Many of these deaths arose from a failure to secure routine treatment for manageable chronic conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure.
- A wide range of studies specific to Medicaid strongly suggest that coverage through Medicaid improves health.³
- Medicaid coverage decreases rates of depression diagnoses; increases use of preventive services and substantially improves financial outlook for those enrolled in the program.⁴
- Finally, no study suggests that people who would be eligible for Medicaid owing to low incomes would be better off *financially* by foregoing coverage. Medicaid is at its heart an insurance product, and is designed to protect people from financial ruin, make medical expenditures predictable and affordable, and reduce the financial barrier to care. Repeated studies show Medicaid to do all three of these things.

1. McWilliams, J. M. 2009. “Health consequences of uninsurance among adults in the United States: recent evidence and implications.” *Milbank Q* 87:443-94.
2. http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411588_uninsured_dying.pdf
3. <http://theincidentaleconomist.com/wordpress/medicaid-iv-summary/>
4. <http://theincidentaleconomist.com/wordpress/oregon-and-medicaid-and-evidence-and-chill-people/>