

## **Their Care Is Essential, but Why Isn't MA Treating It Like So?**

The past year has been longer than anyone could imagine. After all, who could have predicted a global pandemic debilitating normal life as we once knew it. As we continue to mourn the lives lost, both physical and metaphorical, America must move forward in a direction that prioritizes all human lives. The disparities in COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths have exposed the inequitable systems that exist in America. These inequitable systems preserve a healthcare field that prioritizes the lives of certain individuals over others. This past year, government programs and health insurance companies have covered coronavirus-related hospital costs. However, the grace period for covered costs is coming to an end, which could mean hundreds and thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket costs. Such costs aren't feasible for most Americans, much less vulnerable populations such as children with disabilities who don't have a formal immigration status. America is a society that denies access to essential health services all because of your immigration status—as if being a human being in need isn't enough justification. Can you imagine a life where society doesn't deem you worthy of being cared for?

This is the harsh reality for thousands of children across the United States, where the lack of a formal immigration status prevents them from accessing health care. Children with disabilities who don't have a formal immigration status fall within this category of those severely impacted by lack of access to comprehensive care. Access to affordable care is essential to everyone, but exponentially so for those with a disability. In Massachusetts, the state legislature is taking steps to ensure that children with disabilities who don't have a formal immigration status are given access to not just health insurance, but *comprehensive* health insurance. The Cover All Kids with Disabilities bill addresses the needs of children with disabilities who don't have a formal immigration status. If this bill were to pass, this new law would change eligibility requirements for MassHealth CommonHealth to nullify its citizenship status requirement. Thousands of children and young adults with disabilities in Massachusetts are currently only able to access health safety net programs that have strict limitations on covered benefits. Their immigration status is the only barrier preventing these individuals from being eligible for MassHealth CommonHealth. Their current eligible plan, called Children's Medical Security Plan (CMSP), fails to cover a comprehensive list of services that certain physical and/or behavioral health conditions demand.

These children with disabilities do not get home health services. They are not able to visit the emergency room. They do not receive coverage for inpatient hospital care. They are limited to a \$200 cap on prescription drugs. They are limited to \$200 on durable medical equipment. For children with disabilities, the lack of covered services and monetary limitations on both prescription drugs and medical equipment equates to a lack of care. Their needs are severely undermet, yet the state has the ability to provide this vulnerable population with the care that they need.

It's time for Massachusetts to prioritize the lives of some of the most vulnerable populations. Massachusetts residents, leverage your voice to make a difference to these communities. Call your legislators and demand they support the Cover All Kids with Disabilities Bill (S.763/H.1310). Showing support for this community is the first step in getting these children with disabilities who don't have a formal immigration status the essential care they need.

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