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# *Medicaid* **Medicaid Matters New York** *Matters*

## Coronavirus and Beyond: Reaching Greater Equity by Protecting Medicaid and Our Health Care Safety Net

New York State is at the epicenter of a global pandemic. Data has emerged that reflects what we have witnessed almost since the Coronavirus reached our doorstep: severe illness and death from the disease that results from Coronavirus, COVID-19, is significantly more prevalent in communities of color. Outside New York City, 14% of New Yorkers who have died from COVID-19 have been Hispanic and 18% have been Black, while they represent 12% and 9% of the population respectively. In New York City, 62% of fatalities have been suffered by Black and Hispanic residents, while they represent 51% of the New York City population.

The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color reflects the pervasive health disparities which impact low-income communities, people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, older adults, and LGBTQ people. This pandemic has brought back to light the structural racism and oppression that perpetuates poorer health outcomes for people who, by no fault of their own, are more exposed to and less protected from COVID-19. This susceptibility is directly related to numerous factors, including but not limited to: living conditions, income inequality, underlying health conditions, and lack of access to quality health care and community-based services.

Our state leaders face the enormous task of keeping the public safe, protecting frontline and essential workers, keeping our economy from ruin, and much more as the pandemic surges on. It is critically important, however, that New York State do everything possible to reach greater equity for all of its residents. To do that, state leaders must:

- Remember that Medicaid is not the problem; Medicaid improves access to care to sustain health and wellness and must be protected;
- Demand relief from the Federal government, which has the fiscal responsibility to aid states and localities during declared disasters;
- Find ways to avoid budget cuts at this dire time by borrowing from the federal reserve, and/or raising taxes on ultra-wealthy residents if the Federal government does not provide required relief;
- Avoid across-the-board cuts (should cuts become necessary) as they disproportionately damage programs, services, and community-based providers that low-income communities and communities of color rely on;
- Streamline and simplify Medicaid eligibility and enrollment policy and procedures to ensure people seeking coverage and current enrollees obtain and retain Medicaid coverage as easily as possible;
- Protect and enhance the ability of people to obtain and retain home- and community-based long-term services and supports, including strengthening and supporting the home care and attendant workforce;

- Enhance data collection and reporting to drill further down and capture the reality of what is happening in marginalized populations;
- Invest in and ease access to programs and services that address social determinants of health, such as food insecurity, access to child care, housing, and more.

The devastation left behind by this Coronavirus will be felt for years to come. Medicaid Matters New York stands ready to partner with New York State to ensure New Yorkers receive required and urgent disaster and economic relief from the Federal government. While New York State has made efforts to address the tremendous shortfalls being re-exposed by this pandemic, there is so much more we can do. This time is our opportunity to build New York back better by righting the wrongs that have impacted New York's Black and other minority communities for far too long. It is imperative our state policymakers do everything in their power to do just that.