

By Courtney Foster

For many young immigrants in Louisiana, Medicaid is an option

Louisiana’s Medicaid [program provides life-sustaining health coverage](#) for Louisiana residents who couldn’t otherwise afford the cost of care, including children from low- and moderate-income families.¹

In recent years, however, Louisiana has seen declines in child health coverage. Though Louisiana’s child uninsured rate hit a historic low of 3.1% in 2017, it has been [steadily increasing since then](#), with disparities among children of different races.² And coverage gaps among Latinx families have remained alarmingly high. In Louisiana, [13.4% of Latinx children](#) were uninsured in 2019, compared with [3.8% of non-Latinx children](#).³ Now, thanks to a change in state Medicaid policy, some children who live in Louisiana and are in a court process on their pathway to citizenship can also get health coverage through Medicaid depending on their immigration status.

Medicaid rules generally require many eligible immigrants to be in the country for five years before they can get health coverage through the program. But states also have the option to let lawfully residing immigrant children access the program immediately. This offers thousands of Louisiana kids Medicaid coverage, ensuring that regular visits to the doctor remain affordable as they grow.⁴ In February 2019, the Louisiana Department of Health took up that option, eliminating the 5-year bar for eligible immigrant children.⁵ Children eligible under this rule still have to meet other eligibility standards, but they no longer have to wait five years after their arrival in order to get health coverage and access to lifesaving care.

WHICH “LAWFULLY PRESENT” CHILDREN AREN’T SUBJECT TO 5-YEAR BAR FOR MEDICAID AND CHIP IN LOUISIANA?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons fleeing persecution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Refugees ▫ Asylees ▫ People granted Withholding of Deportation or Withholding of Removal ▫ Applicants for Asylum or Withholding of Deportation/Removal • Survivors of Domestic Violence, Trafficking, and Other Serious Crimes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lawful Permanent Residents • Applicants for Adjustment to LPR Status with Approved Visa Petitions • Other Humanitarian Immigrants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Cuban and Haitian Entrants ▫ People paroled into the US for at least one year ▫ People with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) |
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- Domestic Violence Survivors
 - Victims of Trafficking and their Derivative Beneficiaries
 - People who have a U Visa
- People with Deferred Enforced Departure
 - People with Deferred Action⁶ (excluding Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)
 - Special Immigrant Juveniles (pending and approved)

View a full list of eligible categories on [Louisiana Medicaid Eligibility Manual](#);⁷ more detail provided on “lawfully present” statuses at the [National Immigration Law Center](#);⁸ helpful [Reference Guide to Immigration Documents](#).⁹

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After years of anti-immigrant rhetoric, many immigrants in mixed-status families or people on their pathway to citizenship may still hesitate to apply for benefits. Policy change is an important step to closing the coverage gap for many Louisiana immigrant families, but increased reassurance and welcoming messages from advocates and the state Medicaid program are equally needed to successfully promote access to eligible individuals and families.

Endnotes

1. Louisiana Budget Project, “Understanding Medicaid in Louisiana”. December 2018. <https://www.labudget.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Understanding-Medicaid-in-LA-3.pdf>
2. Louisiana Budget Project, “Louisiana Children Health Uninsured Rates: Census 2019”. October 2020. https://www.labudget.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Census-2019_-Child-Health-Insurance.pdf
3. Georgetown University Center for Children and Families, “Getting Back on Track: A Detailed Look at Health Coverage Trends for Latino Children”. June 8, 2021. <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2021/06/08/health-coverage-trends-for-latino-children/>
4. Saloner, B., Koyawala, N., Kenney, G. M., “Coverage For Low-Income Immigrant Children Increased 24.5 Percent In States That Expanded CHIPRA Eligibility”, *Health Affairs*, 33(5); May 2014. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/pdf/10.1377/hlthaff.2013.1363>
5. In 2009 as a part of the Children’s Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA) Section 214, states had the option to expand coverage to lawfully residing immigrant children and pregnant women using federal Medicaid and CHIP funds. Louisiana adopted the measure for children under 19.
6. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals is an excluded category for Medicaid and CHIP eligibility, but other Deferred Action categories are eligible.
7. Louisiana Department of Health “Medicaid Eligibility Manual, I-300: Citizenship/Identity and Qualified Non-Citizen Status”. February 2021. <https://ldh.la.gov/assets/medicaid/MedicaidEligibilityPolicy/I-300.PDF>
8. National Immigration Law Center, “Lawfully Residing’ Children and Pregnant Women Eligible for Medicaid and CHIP” July 2016. <https://www.nilc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/lawfully-residing-imm-categories-CHIPRA-2016-07.pdf>
9. Health Reform: Beyond the Basics, “Reference Guide to Immigration Documents”. November 2017. http://www.healthreformbeyondthebasics.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/REFERENCEGUIDE_Immigration-Documents.pdf