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Safety net hospitals remind us why Medicaid is so essential

Dr. Mitchell Katz

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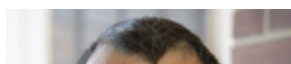
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A lot has changed since I began practicing medicine over 30 years



Dr. Mitchell Katz is president and CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals, the nation's largest municipal healthcare system, and a practicing primary care physician.

ago at a public hospital in San Francisco. Today, we have powerful electronic health systems, a staggering array of specialty referrals and stronger partnerships with advanced practice professionals, to name just a few advancements.

But the most important part of medical care remains the same. Patients still want someone who will listen, treat them with respect, address their ailments and help them stay healthy. For millions of Americans, that's only possible because of Medicaid.

Medicaid cuts would threaten billions in hospital revenue

At NYC Health + Hospitals, New York City's public healthcare system and the largest municipal system in the nation, we live that reality every day. We serve more than a million patients a year at 11 hospitals, five post-acute sites and an extensive network of Federally Qualified Health Centers.

Nearly 70% of our patients are covered by Medicaid or are uninsured. In 2024, we provided care for over 80,000 patients experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, including more than 17,000 children, and we provide nearly 60% of the behavioral health services in New York City. More than 70% of patients self-identify as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, or Asian, and 30% have limited English proficiency.

Last year alone, NYC Health + Hospitals delivered over 15,500 babies — 97% of them covered by Medicaid. The program ensures pregnant people get essential prenatal checkups that can lead to early detection of complications like gestational diabetes, high blood pressure or preeclampsia — conditions that, if treated in time, can save lives and money.

The need doesn't end after delivery. Research shows that 30% of maternal deaths occur between six weeks to one year after childbirth from causes including cardiovascular disease, cancer and substance use. Thanks to a policy change in 2023, [New York State's Medicaid program](#) now covers postpartum care for a full year after delivery, which has led to a 17% reduction in postpartum hospitalizations.

[Children also benefit profoundly](#) from Medicaid. Seventy percent of patients under age 18 in our system are covered by Medicaid. That means annual physicals, dental

cleanings, vaccinations and, especially important now, mental health counseling. When nearly 1 in 5 U.S. teens experience symptoms of anxiety or depression, that access can make all the difference.

Of course the reach doesn't stop there. Medicaid helps people with disabilities live more fully, connecting them to essential tools like hearing aids, walkers and wheelchairs. It supports older adults — many of whom [rely on both Medicare and Medicaid](#) — to afford additional benefits that Medicare doesn't cover, including extended stays in skilled nursing facilities and support with out-of-pocket medical expenses.

Despite misconceptions, Medicaid is not a blank check. It's a smart investment. By encouraging preventive care and connecting patients with primary care providers, the program reduces costly emergency room visits for non-emergency issues. Without this coverage, these patients would show up at the ER because they have nowhere else to go, costing the system more and leading to longer wait times for everyone.

Medicaid is the main source of revenue for our system, as it is for many other safety net hospitals across the country. Nearly 60% of our inpatient discharges are covered by Medicaid, and it helps us support the uncompensated care we provide. Any changes to the program will undoubtedly lead to more people losing their health coverage.

No matter what happens, we will continue to care for all patients, regardless of their health insurance status or ability to pay, because that is our mission. But for safety net providers, cuts to Medicaid would have a compounding effect: more uncompensated care, less revenue and greater strain on already tight budgets.

Cuts to Medicaid will impact not only the people covered under the program, but also the infrastructure of the American healthcare system — including the hospitals, doctors, nurses, social workers and countless other staff needed to provide care. Hospitals are the backbone of both our largest cities and our smallest towns. Medicaid is essential to keeping these communities healthy — in every corner of America.

Dr. Mitchell Katz is president and CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals, the nation's largest municipal healthcare system, and a practicing primary care physician.

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