



October 2020



Race to the Polls

Make Wisconsin Healthier for Communities of Color

Wisconsin's schools, communities, and its economy will be better when every person in the state has access to opportunity—but in order to achieve this, Wisconsin needs lawmakers who will stand up for racial justice and advance policies that promote racial equity. It's absolutely vital this election season that voters demand that candidates promote policies that will improve the well-being of children and families—especially for children and families of color.

Everyone, regardless of employment, immigration, race, economic, or marital status should have access to affordable, comprehensive health coverage. This pandemic shows us that we are all only as well as those who are most vulnerable. Candidates running for office must be committed to protecting and expanding health care coverage, access, and affordability for Wisconsin's kids and families, especially communities of color. Wisconsin has wide racial disparities in access to health insurance and health care, and candidates must pursue solutions that prioritize the health and needs of Black and Brown Wisconsinites who, in addition to existing health disparities, have inequitable rates of hospitalization and death from COVID-19. Specifically, we urge candidates to:

- **Protect the coverage gains Wisconsin has made by defending the Affordable Care Act and continuing to build on our progress.** Kids and families need health coverage to get and stay healthy. They also need economic security so they won't go bankrupt because of a medical emergency. While the uninsured rates for both adults and children have decreased significantly over the past decade, there are still wide inequities among White and Black, Latinx, and Native American residents. For Latinx and Native American Wisconsinites, their uninsured rate is about four times higher than for White people. This doesn't take into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, where thousands of Wisconsinites have lost their jobs and with it their health insurance. The ACA allows for people who've lost their coverage to sign up for affordable health insurance. However, the ACA's fate is still up in the air. Candidates must do everything they can to protect, preserve, and build on the Affordable Care Act.
- **Fully expand Medicaid.** 330,000 Wisconsinites do not currently have health insurance. Wisconsin's partial approach to Medicaid expansion has been insufficient. It leaves us all paying more to cover fewer people, and our failure to expand Medicaid helps to perpetuate inequities in insurance coverage. States that chose to fully expand Medicaid increased the portion of people with insurance significantly more than states that refused to expand health insurance through Medicaid, including Wisconsin.

- **Make sure that Medicaid is strong.** Medicaid provides a vital safety net for lower income people who need health insurance for themselves and their families. Medicaid is designed to grow as need grows, such as during a public health pandemic. Nearly 100,000 more Wisconsinites have been insured through BadgerCare (Medicaid for lower income people and families) since the pandemic began this spring. Policymakers must resist cuts to Wisconsin's Medicaid program that would undermine its ability to respond to any growing needs due to the pandemic, or its capacity to provide critical doctor-recommended services our children and families need to get them healthy and keep them healthy.
- **Prioritize healthy women and healthy babies by expanding Medicaid coverage for new mothers.** Extending health insurance coverage for mothers will help maintain continuity of care and help ensure women and babies are receiving the health care they need. Currently, many pregnant women in Wisconsin are eligible for BadgerCare while they are pregnant, but that coverage ends 60 days after birth. Without continuous coverage, new mothers are at risk of becoming uninsured and not being able to get care for medical conditions that arise, such as complications from childbirth, depression, or pain. Especially in a state with such stark racial inequities in maternal health, Wisconsin should guarantee continuous coverage for women for 12 months after the birth of their child.
- **Protect the Affordable Care Act's consumer protections.** Policymakers should safeguard access to comprehensive health insurance plans that cover people with pre-existing conditions and provide other consumer protections. That can be accomplished by limiting access to unregulated health plans, which often deny people the care they need and leave them with high medical bills and which indirectly increase the cost of insurance plans that protect consumers.
- **Prioritize health equity.** Even with health insurance, people of color often receive worse health care and have worse health outcomes. Candidates should prioritize equity in health care and work to lessen systemic racism and racial bias that exists within health systems. They should also work to increase health care that is provided by people of color and care that's culturally and linguistically responsive to communities of color.

Protecting and expanding health care coverage, access, and affordability for Wisconsin's kids and families, especially communities of color, is important and must be a priority for voters and candidates running for public office. Everyone must play their part in making Wisconsin the best place for every child, every family, and every community.