# Medicaid as a Safety Net in the Face of Economic Insecurity

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# Policy Context

*'...* ***I was UNEMPLOYED with NO MEDICAL INSURANCE****... I suspected that I have [COVID-19] as I was very ill and having difficulty breathing. The Emergency room doctor here ran extremely expensive test[s], most of which were unnecessary…* ***Thousands of dollars I have been charged just to go to the emergency room to make sure I did not have COVID****. …* ***Now they have turned me over to a collection agency****… I have this showing up on my credit bureaus which is* ***crippling to me as I start to try to rebuild my life after a year of very little employment.*** *I cannot rent an apartment or get a car loan.'*

Source: Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. "Complaint 4389089." Consumer Financial Protection Bureau -- Consumer Complaint Database. Published May 19, 2021. Accessed February 27, 2023.

# Policy Context

- **2 in 3 Americans have private health insurance coverage--over half (54%) of all Americans receive coverage through employer-sponsored benefits in 2021**.
  - Becoming unemployed can result in becoming uninsured, coverage loss due to joblessness or work instability can result in:
    - Limited access to health care
    - Declines in physical and mental health
    - Financial risks of trading off between maintaining household expenses with health care expenses or incurring medical debt
      - Can be larger risks for households with underlying medical needs (e.g., chronic conditions or prescription therapies)

  - Healthcare access vulnerable during economic downturns or household financial uncertainty when coverage is coupled with work status

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- **Medicaid—*the public health insurance program for low-income Americans—often* treated as a entitlement program in public debates**
  - Medicaid has capacity for uses similar to unemployment insurance (UI)—a safety net or as an anti-poverty program--for families and individuals at risk of uninsured spells because of unexpected joblessness
    - Expanded access (e.g., via state eligibility guidelines) facilitates this role for Medicaid coverage

# Policy Context and Roles for Medicaid in Economic Security

- Financial protections from Medicaid evaluated in prior studies, less known about this role during economic uncertainty

- Prior studies show expanded Medicaid eligibility guidelines associated with higher participation rates among unemployed during economic downturns such as the Great Recession and the COVID-19 crisis




# Policy Context and Roles for Medicaid in Economic Security

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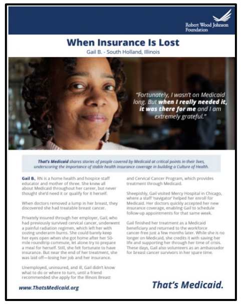
**Susan B**. was employed by the same business for 21 years, but was let go from her job early during the COVID-19. Almost instantly, should could not afford the medicines she needed to control her blood pressure and kidney disease.

- *"I am so grateful Medicaid was there when I really needed it," …. "It's literally saving my life."*

After the 2007-2009 Great Recession, **Linda Y**—a cancer survivor—became routinely underemployed. Soon afterwards, her husband became unemployed thus losing coverage benefits from his employer. After Medicaid expanded in her state, she was then able to resume accessing critically needed care.

- *"Medicaid really provides such a baseline for society," …. "It maintained my health so I was able to continue working."*


After **Gail B**. was diagnosed with treatable breast cancer at 47, she lost her job and employer-sponsored coverage. With support from the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program, she was able to get the remainder of her treatments financed through Medicaid coverage:

- *"Fortunately I wasn't on Medicaid long," …. "But when I really needed it, it was there for me. It supported me through a time of crisis."*

# Thank you!

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