

Rural New Hampshire is Ground Zero for Republicans' Medicaid Cuts

By Rep. Jerry Stringham, D-Lincoln

For as long as I've called Grafton County my home, Ammonoosuc Community Health Services has been a respected pillar of our community. They've helped care for every single patient who walked through its doors, whether or not they could afford to pay the bill.

For the families I represent, quality and affordable health care is already hard to come by. ***That's why I'm so alarmed about what comes next for all of us in the wake of the sudden closure of the Ammonoosuc facility in Franconia.***

We've all been left to grapple with this monumental loss, and there are some common concerns that families are raising.

Where can I go for my annual physical? What about when I get sick? Will I have to drive farther away to see my doctor?

Donald Trump's Big Ugly Bill made massive cuts to health care — driving up premiums and ripping coverage from up to 29,000 Granite Staters. Billionaires are getting a colossal tax break out of it, while working families are left to suffer the consequences.

And it wasn't just Republicans in Congress. Here in New Hampshire, Governor Kelly Ayotte cut Medicaid, imposing new premiums on families who can least afford it and increasing their prescription copay costs.

These steep health care cuts pushed Ammonoosuc to the brink and left them with no option but to close its doors in Franconia.

Ammonoosuc Community Health Services is a federally qualified health center, which means it treats all patients regardless of their ability to pay. Because these facilities help meet health needs in underserved communities — especially rural ones — they require strong support to keep their lights on. Most of these centers are losing money simply by being open, oftentimes dipping into cash reserves and cutting back the services they offer to patients.

At least 2 million community health center patients are expected to lose Medicaid coverage by 2034. Another 2 million Americans, who are losing their health insurance, will be forced to turn to these centers — or whichever ones are left — for basic care.

This is a five-alarm fire that's playing out right before our eyes — and the closure in Franconia reveals how rural healthcare is endangered.

The HealthFirst Family Care Center in Canaan has already announced that it would shutter due to Medicaid cuts. For other health care providers navigating similar financial strain, the writing is on the wall.

Health insurance premiums are spiking for over [70,000 Granite Staters](#) because Republicans still [refuse to extend](#) the Affordable Care Act subsidies. Now families from [Grantham](#) to [Hudson](#) are going to face an impossible choice: pay for health care or pay for groceries.

In the wake of this chaos, our governor has pointed to the federal \$50 billion [Rural Health Transformation Program](#) as a way to keep rural health care providers afloat. Assuming that our state secures the funding, I fear we're just applying a bandaid to a bullet hole — the bleeding won't stop. Our state's hospital association has already [voiced](#) similar concerns. Ultimately, these short-sighted premiums and increases in co-pays for Medicaid Systems will lead to higher costs for those left in the system and a collapse of the delicate system-of-care that we all rely on, not just those on Medicaid.

In the New Hampshire House of Representatives, I serve on Division 3 of the Finance Committee, which writes the Health and Human Services (HHS) portion of the budget. Last session, I had a front row seat to the statewide Medicaid debate and pushed back against Kelly Ayotte's unaffordable health care cuts because of the harm they have on rural communities like mine. While Democrats were able to eliminate the 3% cuts in Medicaid rates included in the state's republican budget, these other cuts remained. If Ayotte and other Republicans continue to rip health care away from Granite Staters come 2026, I'll be fighting back every step of the way.

Our community may have been one of the first to suffer this loss, but it likely won't be the last.

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