

Reporting Requirements Jeopardize Health Care for Rural Idahoans



Many Residents Don't Have Access to Steady Jobs, Particularly in Rural Idaho

Most people eligible for Medicaid expansion work, but the jobs they are able to get in Idaho are often unstable. This is in part because Idaho's job market is tilted towards two of the top three industries offering just part-time work – retail and food services. Retail trade has the second highest share of workers in Idaho – employing more than 85,000 people on average in 2017. The accommodation and food services industry employed more than 64,000 residents with annual wages of just \$16,016 that year and it is in the top three industries for job growth.

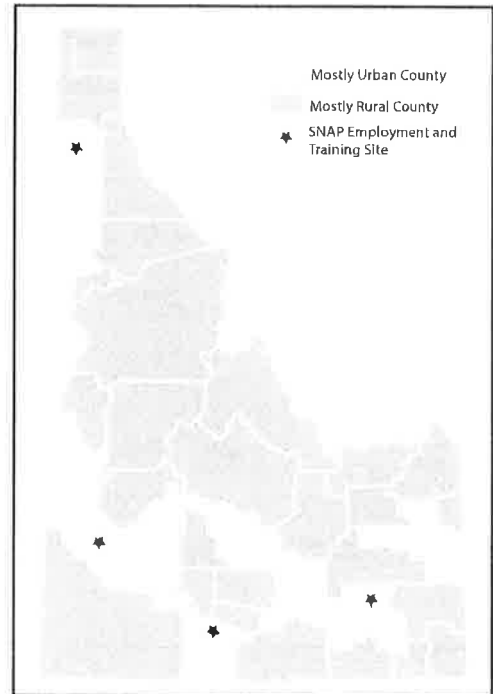
Adding work reporting requirements for health care would especially harm rural workers facing additional hurdles in the labor market. Rural parts of Idaho often have fewer full-time, year-round jobs than the state average. For example, the share of jobs that are full-time in Ada County is 25 percent higher than in Bonner County. Many of Idaho's farmers and ranchers eligible for Medicaid expansion face unstable work conditions through no fault of their own, like price fluctuations, changing tariffs, and weather conditions that impact farm output.

Access to Work Alternatives Varies Greatly in Idaho

To get health care under a work reporting requirement, people relying on Medicaid would have to participate in the employment and training program if they are not working. Idaho has just four employment and training sites across the 83,569 square mile state – none of which are located in rural counties. Someone from Salmon or Grangeville would need to drive more than three hours each way to get to an employment and training site.

Participants in the employment and training program may meet some requirements online, if they have internet access. Across the state, more than one in five Idaho households does not have internet at home and the rate is closer to one in three for rural parts of the state. There are many parts of Idaho that are so mountainous and remote that even phone access is less common. If work reporting requirements were added to Medicaid, many families without access to stable jobs, who live far from employment and training sites, would not have the ability to meet reporting requirements remotely.

Rural Idahoans who are able to get access to online courses are more likely to receive less effective training compared to their peers who are able to participate in person. Students who take online courses are less likely to perform well and have lower completion rates. Findings from the USDA also suggest that online courses may exacerbate existing achievement gaps – adding to the conclusion that work reporting requirements would increase hardship without improving long-term employment outcomes. In addition to facing the barriers already mentioned, research from other states indicates that rural Idahoans likely have caregiving responsibilities, undiagnosed intellectual disabilities, and other limitations that may make meeting a work reporting requirement difficult.



Taking Away Health Coverage Will Not Help Idahoans Access Stable Jobs

There is minimal evidence linking workforce participation with access to critical public supports. What is certain is that adding a work reporting requirement to Medicaid would increase administrative burden and likely decrease the number of families who are able to get the medical care they need, especially in rural parts of the state. Programs with lower administrative burden reach more eligible people than programs that make participants jump through hoops to get help meeting their basic needs. Decades of research have shown that complicated applications and documentation requirements lead to fewer people getting the help they need for things like food and health care.

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The Idaho Rural Health Association provides leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communication, education and collaboration.
5712 W. Castle Drive, Boise ID 83703
www.idahorha.org