

Most Texas Adults with Serious and Chronic Illnesses Do Not Qualify for Medicaid

Texas Medicaid rules strictly limit which adults can get health coverage. As a result, there are more than 3.5 children enrolled for every one adult we cover.

These are the adults Texas Medicaid covers today:

- Low-income pregnant women (coverage ends 2 months after birth).
- Low-income women with Breast or Cervical Cancer (covered during treatment).
- Extremely low-income parents caring for children (*example: parents in family with 2 children must earn less than \$386 per month to get Medicaid coverage*).
- Former Foster Care Children (coverage from age 19, ends at age 26)
- People age 65 and over, and people with disabilities, who are below or near poverty.
 - This group is mostly made up of Texans receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI). These Texans either have a serious disability or are over 65, and must have income below the SSI upper limit of \$733 a month (which is below the poverty income line). A smaller number can have higher income if they need medical care to avoid an institution like a nursing facility.

Little-Known Facts about Adults and Texas Medicaid:

- **Most parents whose children get Medicaid cannot get Medicaid themselves** (3 million Texas children but fewer than 150,000 parents covered in November 2015).
- **Many Texas adults with serious illnesses and complex chronic conditions (e.g., cancer, MS) do not qualify for Medicaid.** Only those who get federal SSI disability benefits can get Medicaid.

Most Adults who Can Work, Can't get Texas Medicaid. Why? To get SSI disability benefits, an adult must be so incapacitated by health conditions that even the simplest forms of employment are impossible. As long as a person can work *even at a very reduced capacity*, they will not get SSI disability payments, and in Texas that also means they will not get Medicaid. So, even if before your illness you taught physics, and now you can only do much simpler, lower-paying work, you still can be denied SSI because you are capable of employment.

This strict limit may be the right choice for determining who gets cash disability benefits. However, it is a disastrous choice for letting adults who want to work be as productive as they possibly can be, and empowering them to be the best parents they possibly can be.

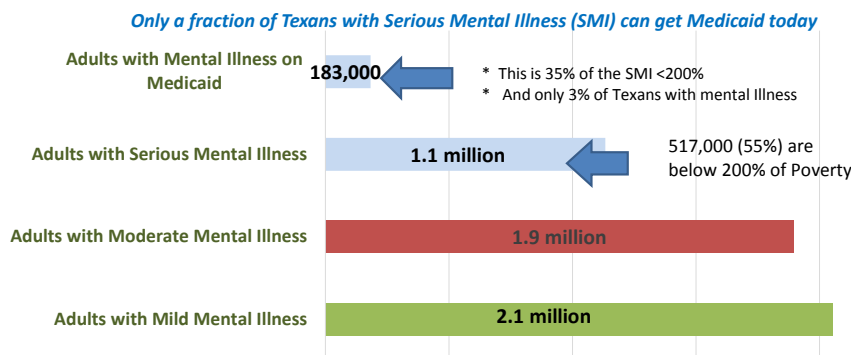
Untreated Illness means Less Work and Lower-Quality work. Many Texas adults are dealing with serious and often multiple chronic conditions that substantially reduce the number of hours they can work, the complexity of the work they can accomplish, and thus their earning power. **Texans with serious and chronic illnesses need access to health care treatment to be productive and to avoid spiraling into full disability.**

Untreated Illness also Contributes to Avoidable and more Severe Disability. In Texas, limiting Medicaid for adults only to those who can no longer work at all (and get SSI) results in many adults going untreated until their conditions deteriorate into full disability. Social Security policy guidelines require proof of *“medically determinable impairment(s) severe enough to prevent you from doing any gainful activity...which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.”*ⁱ As a result, in Texas a person with a serious condition typically cannot get health care based on that diagnosis **unless and until they can no longer work**, and are expected to remain that way for (or die within) the next 12 months.

These major disorders **DO NOT** qualify a Texas adult for disability and Medicaid, *until the individual cannot work or is expected to die*:

- Cancer (lung, breast, lymphoma, leukemia, multiple myeloma, etc.);
- Multiple Sclerosis;
- Lupus,
- Schizophrenia; Bipolar Disorder, Major Depression, PTSD;
- ALS (Lou Gehrig’s disease);
- Muscular Dystrophy;
- Parkinson’s;
- Diabetes,
- Heart disease,
- Stroke,
- Arthritis,
- Crohn's disease,
- HIV positive
- Epilepsy and seizure disorders.

Spotlight on Mental Health: 5 million Texans in need, but few qualify for Medicaid



Sources: Social Security Administration, preliminary estimates Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute.

Illustration:
Only about 183,000 Texans under 65 qualified for mental illness disability-based (SSI) Medicaid in December 2014.

This means only a fraction of the most gravely impaired Texans with mental illness qualified for comprehensive

medical care. Texas adults with severe or moderate mental health may be judged able to work if their symptoms come and go, and thus denied SSI and Medicaid. As a result, those who might benefit most/have the most robust recovery from ongoing mental health treatment and a medical home do not get either. ^{ii iii}

There is a solution. The lack of Medicaid coverage for all but the most severely incapacitated applies not only to mental health, but across many other diagnoses and diseases, chronic illnesses, and people with multiple medical diagnoses. This is why our state has so many adults with very significant chronic and serious illnesses who do not get Medicaid. Among these Texans, those with incomes below poverty (\$24,300 for a family of 4 in 2016) also are ineligible for Marketplace subsidies for private insurance. **They are in the “Texas Coverage Gap,” and a Texas health coverage program to close that gap could improve the lives and futures of hundreds of thousands facing serious illnesses, and save local and state budgets billions in health care spending.**



ⁱ <https://www.ssa.gov/disability/professionals/bluebook/general-info.htm>

ⁱⁱ https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi_asr/2014/sect06.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/84R/handouts/C3822016021810001/512216a8-6dd0-4ebc-aaf1-889ee91922f4.PDF>