

The Budget Bill's Hidden Health Crisis

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The budget bill adopted by the House of Representatives on May 22 is not so much a fiscal blueprint as a manifesto in policy retrenchment. Behind its rhetoric of “restraint” lies a dramatic reordering of national health priorities—chief among them, an aggressive rollback of Medicaid coverage and an erosion of the Affordable Care Act. It is a return to the failed “Repeal and Replace” effort of 2017, now being sold as an exercise in fiscal restraint.

To pay for the [\\$3.8 trillion in tax cuts for the wealthy](#), the bill includes \$792 billion in cuts to Medicaid. Of that, \$360 billion targets the ACA's Medicaid expansion—[disenfranchising an estimated 7.6 million beneficiaries](#).

One mechanism used by the bill involves work requirements for Medicaid clients. Earlier versions would have rolled these requirements out in 2029, but the timeline for imposing them has been [advanced to the end of 2026](#), at the urging of the Freedom Caucus. That single maneuver would account for [\\$280 billion](#) in projected “savings.” Another \$165 billion would be achieved by delaying eligibility rules that had been issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services. [These rules were designed to streamline the application and enrollment processes in Medicaid.](#)