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NORTH AMERICA

NORTH AMERICA MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
June 2026

Good afternoon,

Medicaid is a vital program in the United States—it covers more than 67 million people and accounts for roughly thirty percent of total state spending on average, including both state and federal dollars. At the same time, state leaders are being asked to do more with less. There is pressure to both improve health outcomes and control costs, all while navigating new community engagement requirements. Amid this pressure, states have a clear opportunity to use rigorous evidence to guide decisions and target resources more effectively.

Over the past eight months, my colleagues and I at the SCALE lab at the Yale School of Public Health have partnered with J-PAL North America to launch the Medicaid Learning Lab, a new cohort-based program that helps Medicaid agencies and researchers adapt rigorous research methods to the practical realities of Medicaid administration. This latest iteration of J-PAL North America's Learning Lab model will focus on building the capacity of Medicaid leaders to use evidence in their decision-making and, when conditions are right, generate new evidence through structured test-and-learn models. Through a comprehensive suite of offerings, including training workshops, peer connections, technical assistance, and researcher-led talks featuring randomized evaluations in the Medicaid space, Learning Lab participants will be equipped to continuously test-and-learn to improve their programs.

With new challenges mounting for Medicaid leaders, the Medicaid Learning Lab provides the frameworks and tools for states to incorporate evidence into their decision-making during this critical time. Beyond technical skills and peer connections, the Learning Lab will also connect researchers in the J-PAL network with policymakers to pursue innovative research that addresses today's policy needs.

I encourage you to learn more about the Medicaid Learning Lab and sign up for J-PAL North America's health-focused mailing list to receive updates on this new program.

Sincerely,

Jacob Wallace
Medicaid Learning Lab Scientific Advisor, J-PAL North America
Faculty Co-Director, SCALE at the Yale School of Public Health

Photo credit: Shutterstock

Introducing the Medicaid Learning Lab

This June, J-PAL North America launched the Medicaid Learning Lab, a peer-learning offering that is designed to help Medicaid agencies test, learn, and improve health care delivery. The program will provide training on existing evidence in Medicaid and test-and-learn strategies, personalized technical assistance, and the opportunity to connect with peers and researchers to share ideas and insights. Learn more about the Medicaid Learning Lab »

Photo credit: J-PAL North America

Featured opportunity: J-PAL North America's Learning Lab model

J-PAL North America's Learning Labs provide customized, cohort-based training sessions, technical assistance, and peer learning focused around a specific policy area or geography, with the goal of helping government and nonprofit leaders leverage rigorous evidence to advance their work. To date, J-PAL has launched two Learning Labs—one focused on climate action in the United States, and one to support agencies and organizations in Puerto Rico. And we are thrilled to launch the Medicaid Learning Lab—our third Learning Lab—this summer. Learn more about how this innovative model strengthens institutional capacity to improve lives with evidence »

Photo credit: Health Affairs Forefront

Opinion: How randomized evaluations can guide policy innovation in Medicaid

In a Health Affairs Forefront opinion piece, Gui Woolston, the former Connecticut Medicaid Director, and J-PAL North America Co-Scientific Director, Amy Finkelstein (MIT), call on Medicaid programs across the country to take advantage of opportunities to pursue test-and-learn approaches through randomized evaluations to achieve their policy goals and ultimately improve peoples' health. Read the article »

FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY

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Expanding Medicaid to low-income, uninsured adults

In a landmark evaluation, researchers took advantage of a lottery in Oregon that gave low-income uninsured adults the chance to apply for Medicaid to study the impact of health insurance on several outcomes. Medicaid coverage increased health care use, including use of preventive services and visits to emergency departments; reduced financial strain; reduced depression, and improved self-reported health while having no detectable impact on physical health outcomes or involvement with the criminal legal system. Read more »

FEATURED RESEARCH RESOURCE

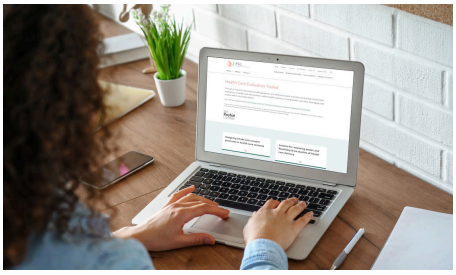

Photo credit: Shutterstock

Navigating hospital Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)

Social scientists seeking to partner with hospitals to conduct research on health care delivery may find it daunting to work with a hospital IRB that is likely more accustomed to reviewing medical trials. This research resource provides guidance on how to carefully explain study procedures and impacts on important hospital stakeholders like patients and providers, as well as guidance on how to approach IRB review when a project spans multiple institutions or subject areas.

This resource is part of our "Health Care Evaluation Toolkit," supported by the MIT Roybal Center and the National Institute on Aging of the National Institutes of Health.

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