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[Opinion: What you need to know about Medicaid-like, 60 percent of beneficiaries have jobs](#)

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Medicaid – called Medi-Cal in California – is the backbone of health coverage for more than 74 million Americans. Nearly 20 million receive services through Safety Net Health Plans such as Santa Clara Family Health Plan, where we provide health coverage for 270,000 of our neighbors, friends and loved ones here in Santa Clara County.

Medicaid is not a distant program that benefits only one group of people. It helps Americans across all demographics – economic, ethnic, racial and generational.

Medicaid is us.

The U.S. Congress has put the health of millions at risk with its counterproductive attempts to gut Medicaid. The changes being proposed will move America's health care system, and our entire economy, in a dangerous and harmful direction, phasing out Medicaid coverage for millions of Americans and threatening the viability of the Medicaid system through underfunded per capita allotments.

Medicaid isn't welfare. Almost 60 percent of adults with Medicaid coverage are working. Nearly half of them work for small businesses with fewer than 50 employees. Medicaid is essential for hardworking Americans to keep their jobs.

Medicaid helps people manage their chronic illnesses – so they can keep working. It is critical to supporting drug rehabilitation programs to counter the opioid epidemic sweeping the nation – so people can get well and get back to work.

Nearly two-thirds of older and disabled Americans rely on Medicaid to help pay for nursing homes and care, lifting a burden off family members – so they can continue to work.

In California, we see evidence of the benefits of Medicaid for people from all walks of life, and the economic and job security that Medicaid coverage brings. Here in Santa Clara County, the expansion of Medicaid has provided health coverage to 106,000 adults.

Of the 83,000 adults who receive their coverage through our health plan, 38 percent have one or more chronic conditions. To these people, Congress is saying, "your health doesn't matter." Without Medicaid, these people – our neighbors, our friends, our relatives, ourselves – will have no access to preventive services or outpatient treatment, no way to get prescription medications.

If we sit on the sidelines and watch, we shouldn't be surprised by the negative consequences that will spread well beyond those who lose their health coverage. Look for:

- An increase in expensive emergency room visits, followed by even more expensive hospitalizations.
- More severe end-stage complications, such as amputation and dialysis.

- Increases in homelessness, crime and incarceration due to unmanaged mental illness and substance abuse.
- A disproportionate financial burden on Santa Clara County safety net hospitals for uncompensated care.

In his campaign, and throughout his administration, President Trump has promised that “Every single American will have the opportunity to realize his or her fullest potential. The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer.”

Millions of these forgotten Americans are able to work only because they receive health care coverage through Medicaid.

At Santa Clara Family Health Plan, we have joined a campaign to support Medicaid called Medicaid is US. We believe we have a moral obligation to the members we serve to do everything we can to ensure they maintain access to quality, affordable healthcare. We also recognize a responsibility to make this case in a civil and dignified manner that respects legitimate differences of opinion about health care policy in America.

At every point in our lives, Medicaid is there to ensure that we and our loved ones have the health security we all need to maintain economic security. Medicaid belongs to everyone and benefits everyone. In this debate, there is no us and them. There is only us.

Christine M. Tomcala is CEO of the Santa Clara Family Health Plan. She wrote this for The Mercury News.