

2025 Minnesota Medicaid Equity Forum

Medicaid Matters: Amplifying Impact through Storytelling and Inclusive Communication

Brief History of the Forums

In March 2023, the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Health Care Administration launched the first MN Medicaid Equity Forum. The forum aimed to build off of the collective work between the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and DHS' partnership with eight of Minnesota's managed care organizations to coordinate and share resources to help connect more Minnesotans from communities hardest hit by COVID-19 to lifesaving vaccines.

The first two forums centered on addressing the need for community guidance and solutions during the reinstatement of health care eligibility renewals for Minnesota Health Care Programs (MHCP). The MN Medicaid Equity Forums operate on the fundamental belief that achieving health equity requires centering the experiences of the most impacted communities and fostering collective action for sustainable change. To this end, the forums actively engage a diverse group of partners, including community-based organizations, faith-based groups, Minnesota Health Care Programs enrollees, managed care organizations, health care providers, Tribal Nations, Urban American Indian organizations, Minnesota county and state agencies, and DHS staff and leadership.

Each forum has therefore brought new collaborators to the space and through investments made by DHS leadership and support from DHS' Community Relations team the reach and impact of the collective work has grown. The redetermination of MHCP coverage was Minnesota's largest initiative around health insurance since the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. The Equity Forums were a key venue for DHS and its partners to discuss and determine how to focus funding and attention on decreasing racial and geographic disparities in disenrollment during the "unwind" and it worked. Disparities in disenrollment for Black & most American Indian enrollees disappeared & disparities for Hispanic/Latine enrollees significantly narrowed. That underlies the most important aspect of the forums, a commitment to action and accountability.



2025 Forum Focus

Understanding that Medicaid is fundamental to the health and opportunity of Minnesotans—and in light of potential federal policy shifts that could significantly affect its funding—the Minnesota Medicaid Equity Forum this year proactively focused on the theme “Medicaid Matters: Amplifying Impact through Storytelling and Inclusive Communication.” The forum highlighted the importance of personal stories and inclusive communication strategies as tools to protect and strengthen this essential program and provided [Medicaid Matters](#) resources for attendees to use and share in their communities.

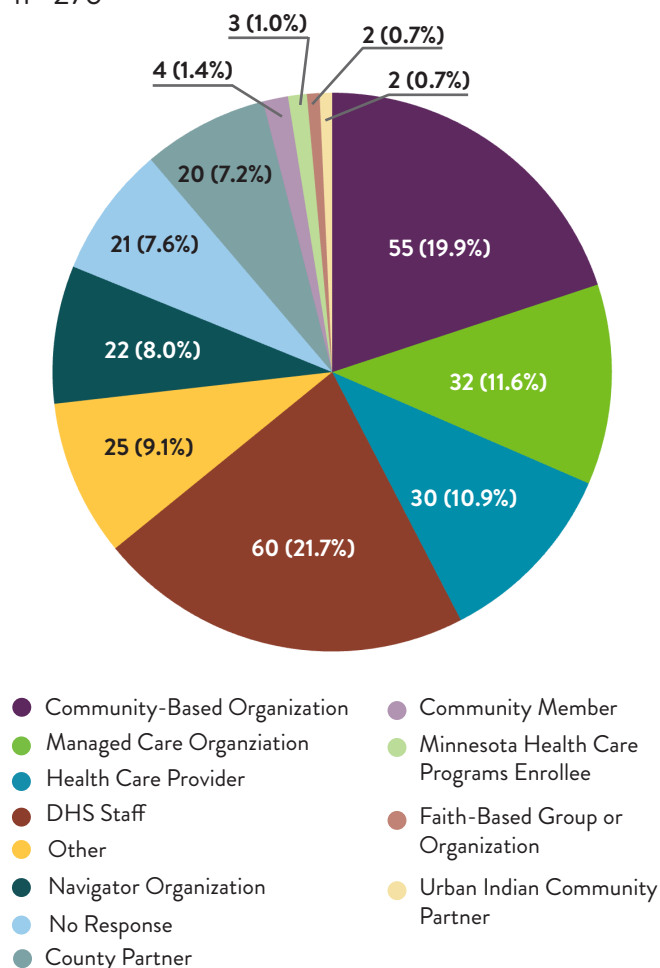


Forum Goals:

- Elevating community-led, community-centered guidance and solutions to improve Minnesota Health Care Programs.
- Fostering cross-sector connections and partnerships.
- Building skills in storytelling and advocacy around the importance of Medicaid in Minnesota.
- Committing to actionable items for sustaining statewide collective health equity efforts with a focus on health communication and health literacy.

Forum Participants

n= 276



Themes from Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology is a meeting facilitation method where everyone gets to talk about what's most important to them. Instead of having a set list of topics, the people at the meeting decide what they want to discuss. Someone starts by suggesting a topic, and then anyone excited about that topic joins in the conversation. This lets everyone share their ideas and work together to find solutions. The following themes emerged from the ACET, Inc.-facilitated Open Space Technology sessions held across the Metro Area, Greater Minnesota (Greater MN), and virtual forums. These themes highlight key areas related to Medicaid and health equity in Minnesota.



1. Inclusive Health Communication Strategies

Participants across all forums emphasized the importance of effective and accessible communication to ensure community members can access and understand healthcare information.

> Key Insights and Actionable Steps

- Utilizing simple language is crucial for effective communication (Metro).
- Storytelling through lived experience builds trust and facilitates understanding (Greater MN).
- Community organizations play a vital role in delivering complex health information (Virtual).
- Tailoring resources to specific communities, considering language and cultural barriers, is essential (Metro).
- Streamline the process in which individuals receive communication regarding healthcare options so that it reduces "mail anxiety."
- Utilize diverse modes of communication (i.e., culturally specific modes & methods of communication and newspapers/radio for elders).

"Enrollment specialists with lived experience can help create trust."
(Participant at the Greater MN forum).



2. Importance of Medicaid

The value of Medicaid and the potential negative impacts of budget cuts were significant concerns across all forums. Participants highlighted the diverse populations that rely on Medicaid services.

➤ Key Insights and Actionable Steps

- Medicaid serves various populations, including adults and children with disabilities, older adults, new birthing parents, unemployed individuals, the unsheltered, undocumented individuals, those with medical debt, people experiencing domestic violence, those needing transportation, and individuals seeking substance use disorder treatment (All Forums).
- Budget cuts raise concerns about reduced services and support, particularly for vulnerable populations (Metro, Virtual).
- Understaffed county, DHS and MNsure agencies exacerbate challenges in accessing Medicaid (Virtual).
- Transportation is a significant barrier to accessing services (Greater MN).
- Medicaid impacts everyone, even those who are not enrollees. Cuts to Medicaid will impact physical and mental health, education, employment and the broader economy.

“[Regarding pregnancy or birth care] What if you lose your job? How would you pay for care?”
(Participant at the Metro Forum).



3. Health Literacy and Access

Participants identified health literacy as a cross-cutting issue, with a lack of access to technology and complex systems creating barriers to accessing information and services.

➤ Key Insights and Actionable Steps

- Technology barriers, including a lack of internet access and digital literacy, impede health literacy (All Forums).
- Improving digital access and providing support for navigating complex systems is essential (Metro, Virtual).
- Health literacy impacts individuals' ability to understand and utilize health information, affecting their access to care (Greater MN).
- Clear communication, including simplified language and visual aids, is crucial (Greater MN, Virtual).
- Create information regarding differences between health insurance options (Medicaid, Medicare etc.) that keep in mind literacy and diverse spoken/written languages.

“Digital access and literacy is a huge barrier which makes it difficult to access food and medical care.”
(Participant at the Virtual forum).





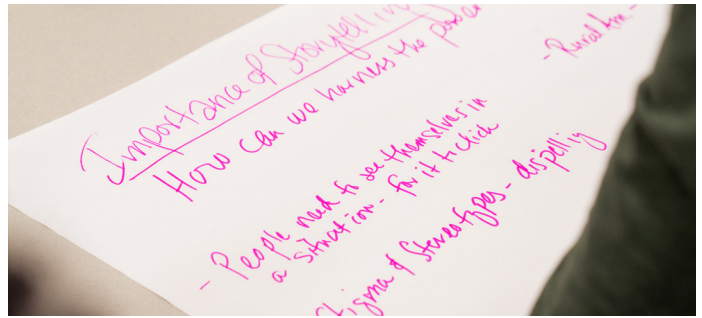
4. Authentic Engagement: Centering Community Voices

Authentic community engagement was identified as crucial for effective service delivery. Participants stressed the importance of community-led outreach, building trust, and addressing disparities.

> Key Insights and Actionable Steps

- Authentic care begins with listening and engaging with the community (Metro).
- Supporting community partner organizations is essential for outreach and service delivery (Greater MN, Virtual).
- Community outreach should be tailored to specific populations, considering cultural nuances and barriers (Metro, Greater MN).
- Addressing misinformation and building trust are critical components of effective engagement (Metro).
- Create community engagement teams that can help reduce barriers to application processes and engage and build trust with participants.

“Nothing about us, without us.”
(Participant at the Metro Forum).



5. Importance of Storytelling

The power of storytelling to drive change, reduce stigma, and foster understanding was highlighted across forums.

> Key Insights and Actionable Steps

- Storytelling can reduce stigma associated with Medicaid and government support (Metro).
- Sharing personal stories can influence legislators and voters (Virtual).
- Storytelling in multiple languages and formats is important for reaching diverse audiences (Greater MN).
- Storytelling promotes empathy, solidarity, and a sense of shared experience (Virtual).
- Storytelling as a teaching tool from a reliable narrator with a call to action that allows access for a diverse group of people (generations, immigrant/new American, individuals living with mental health challenges, etc.).

“Focus more on similarities—we have a lot in common and are stronger together.”
(Participant at the Greater MN forum).



Panel Discussions and Key Insights

We were honored to host two panel discussions at each forum featuring speakers from community clinics, counties, health systems, community and faith-based organizations, health plans, advocacy organizations, MNsure Navigator organizations and people enrolled in Medicaid. Panel discussions focused on the topics of Medicaid Matters and Uplifting Health Equity through Centering Community and Sharing Stories. Across all three forums, the importance of Medicaid emerged as the most frequently mentioned and important topic.

Panelists emphasized how Medicaid supports a wide range of people—including children, seniors, people with disabilities, immigrants, Indigenous communities, rural residents, and LGBTQ+ individuals. They shared how Medicaid provides access to essential care like preventive services, maternal health, mental health, dental care, and gender-affirming treatments. **Many noted that without Medicaid, these basic health services would be unaffordable or completely out of reach.**



Panelists also described **Medicaid as a structural backbone of Minnesota's health system**, explaining how Medicaid funding helps keep rural hospitals open, supports local economies, and sustains healthcare jobs. It also enables clinics, community organizations, and social service agencies to hire staff, conduct outreach, provide consistent care and provide flexible and innovative services.

There was deep concern about the harm that cuts to Medicaid would cause—not just to individuals and families, but to entire communities. Panelists spoke about what happens when people lose coverage: missed preventive care, delayed treatments, and a heavier burden on emergency departments. Panelists shared



fears around clinics and hospitals closing, especially in rural areas, services being reduced and processing times at counties getting longer. Panelists described Medicaid as a key tool to close racial, gender, geographic, and economic health disparities in Minnesota and warned that cuts to Medicaid could worsen existing health disparities.

Throughout the forums, panelists shared personal stories about how Medicaid impacted, and in some cases saved, their lives. **Panelists stressed that storytelling is a powerful tool to build empathy, shift public opinion, and drive change—especially when paired with a clear call to action.**

Another key theme was the importance of collective action and advocacy. Panelists called for more education, collaboration, and political engagement to protect and strengthen Medicaid. They described how system complexity and confusion can make it hard for people to get the care they need or understand how Medicaid works. Panelists highlighted how stigma and misinformation around Medicaid also contribute to a lack of public support. **The need for clear, culturally relevant messaging tailored to different audiences and communities was highlighted as a priority action step.**

Panel quotes:

“The lesson is that equity really lives in the details in how we approach people with compassion, with care, and making sure that programs are not just available but also accessible.”

“Telling real stories of the community helps people feel visible, valued [and] empowered, and transforms feelings of exclusion into the sense of belonging and trusting in the healthcare system. So, its stories that shift perspectives.”



Survey Responses

Post-forum survey responses highlighted that the Open Space Technology discussions facilitated by ACET, Inc. and the opening remarks were the most highly rated elements of the 2025 MN Medicaid Equity Forums. Survey respondents also noted that forum facilitation, pre-forum communications, and the agenda structure made participating in the forum easier for them.

DHS will utilize the themes and ideas for action that came out of the forums to inform its work in the coming year. This will show up in the policy proposals submitted to the Governor, the reports published and the way grants are administered. DHS is also continuing to work on internal processes that can more routinely incorporate community member guidance and wisdom.



Ways to stay engaged

The journey to health equity

“In any social revolution, there are times when the tail winds of triumph and fulfillment favor us, and other times when strong head winds of disappointment and setbacks beat against us relentlessly. We must not permit adverse winds to overwhelm us as we journey across life’s mighty Atlantic.” — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

The work of equity requires community guidance and co-creation. Relationships with community require trust. For our community members to trust us DHS has to continue to show up. The annual equity forums are therefore one of many ways DHS is working to center community and lead or participate in collective work. There are several ways to stay connected and continue to contribute to actions that come out of the forums.

The MN Medicaid Equity Partnership meets monthly, typically on the second Tuesday of the month from 3-4 p.m. via Zoom, to bring together community organizations, health care partners, and others focused on Medicaid equity. This partnership’s strength lies in its variety of participating organizations. To join, please [Subscribe to Minnesota Medicaid Equity Partnership](#). **Communications Roundtable:** This group of communications professionals meets quarterly to share new Medicaid and MinnesotaCare communications materials and campaigns, best communications practices with public health care programs, the latest data and more. Meetings are typically the fourth Thursday from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. To join, email: MHCP.roundtables.DHS@state.mn.us

The Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council (CECLC) meets monthly, typically on the third Friday of the month. The purpose of the council is to advise the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) on reducing disparities and inequities that affect racial and ethnic groups within DHS programs. The council, consisting of 15 to 25 members appointed by the commissioner, is charged with reviewing DHS policies for racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and tribal disparities and providing an annual report regarding equitable delivery of services. Meetings are held the third Friday of each month from 12- 4 p.m. Meetings are in person with a hybrid option to join via Webex. Contact ceclc.information.dhs@state.mn.us to receive meeting link and information. Additionally, the **Faces of Medicaid** project collects and shares personal stories about the importance of Medicaid from a variety of perspectives; you can submit your own story through a [survey](#) on the Medicaid Matters website.

We encourage you to explore these opportunities to remain an active voice in shaping the future of Medicaid.

Please direct any questions about this report to [OMMD.Inbox.DHS@state.mn.us](#)

