

Voices of Medicaid Expansion

Joanna W., 50, Cleveland
Cuyahoga Health Access Partnership Member

I was going to a health center for my doctor, and was having a lot of problems. No one knew what was going on. They gave me different medicines, kept putting me on different pain pills, but nothing was working. One of the doctors said, "There's this program, and if we can't find what you need, we can send you to the Cleveland Clinic and get you testing to find out what the problem is." That's when I signed up for CHAP, and I filled out the paperwork and had the appointment with Cleveland Clinic. I was able to get my tests at no cost to me, and thank God they were able to diagnose my problem. But it was a full year before that, living in pain, without anyone knowing what was going on. Once I was able to get those tests I was able to get back to my activities and my life. There are some things I still need, like prescription assistance. If I could get my benefits through Medicaid, it would be such a blessing. It wouldn't be so hard to get what you need. It would be a blessing for many, many people. There are so many people out there in need. So many. Expanding Medicaid will save lives. A lot of lives.

Carl Engelhart, 49, Lakewood
North Coast Health Ministry Patient

Suffering from seizures and chronic back pain lingering from a workplace injury in the 1990s, Carl Engelhart approached North Coast Health Ministry Medical Director Dr. Philip Tomsik about help with the documentation required to apply for disability income. Discharged from prison in 2009 and without prospects for an income, Carl believed qualifying for disability was his only hope for survival. "I was staying two weeks ahead of homelessness and couldn't get a job," he says.

Not believing Carl met the qualifications for disability, Dr. Tomsik provided care to treat his seizures and back pain and recommended Carl to the Bureau for Vocational Rehabilitation. There, with the help of a counselor, Carl put together a career plan and began a training program in computer numerical controlled (CNC) machining.

Through coursework completed at Cuyahoga Community College, he has earned four certificates toward certification as a CNC lathe operator. He enrolled in the Cleveland Institute of Technical Machining and is on track for job placement.



"I love numbers. I love math. I got a 95 percent on my school entrance exam," Carl says. "The top manufacturers in the CNC industry shop my school. In five years, I see myself as the premier set-up man and programmer for whatever shop I work for."

Carl credits North Coast Health Ministry with helping him get on the path to self-sufficiency and a career. "If it weren't for Dr. Tomsik, I wouldn't have any of this," he says. "I have learned that you can change anything in your life. You just need to put it in your mind's eye and do it."

Expanding eligibility for Medicaid to people like Carl while they are completing career training would improve their access to needed health care and increase the odds that their paths back to self-sufficiency will not be derailed by illness or injury.

**Nazlah J., 36, Cleveland Heights
Cuyahoga Health Access Partnership Member**

It's such a challenge to retain good health. I have tried to maintain things on my own, using things like Google, and that's just not the way to do things. I want to stay healthy and take care of myself, so I do what I can, but I don't know what is correct and what isn't. I don't have the resources. There is so much misleading information out there, there is no way to know what is true and what isn't. I am a student. I am still working and trying to go for a higher degree. The only way to advance is to keep going to school, but in the meantime I don't have healthcare. If people are unemployed or if you're not working over 20 hours, your income isn't high enough to afford low-level coverage, let alone quality health care. Medicaid changes everything. People like me, students, people who are working but don't make enough to have the resources they need, we need that support. If I have to pay more taxes, I will do it so that everyone can be covered. I will do it. The world has changed. It is so difficult to stay healthy when you don't have money. Expanding Medicaid is needed. Not just for me, but for everybody.

Note: In compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, all individual stories are shared with their informed consent.

"I can't look at the disabled, I can't look at the poor, I can't look at the mentally ill, I can't look at the addicted and think we ought to ignore them. For those who live in the shadows of life, for those who are the least among us, I will not accept the fact that the most vulnerable in our state should be ignored. We can help them."

"I just want to take you one place. One day your son comes home, your daughter comes home, says, mom, my brain's not working right - - put it in your family. Put somebody that is in your family who becomes the way ward child. They come home one day, they can't get a job - - put it on your doorstep, and you'll understand how hard it is."

Governor Kasich, State of the State, 2013