



Defending Medicaid Against Federal Cuts

WEBINAR

February 13, 2025

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3. **One thing you're doing to take care of yourself** these days

On Tap Today



Welcome!

The Moment We're In

The Medicaid Cuts Research

Communications Insights

Q&A/Discussion

The Moment We Are In



- **Congress wants to cut \$2.5 trillion from Medicaid.** We're expecting this number to evolve with the reconciliation package.
- **These cuts would have a devastating impact on the people who can least afford it** – decimating the budgets of Medicaid programs around the country and leading to a massive loss of coverage.
- **The win: stopping cuts.**

The Research



We know: How to talk about Medicaid with progressives - what definitions work, the important role it plays, and the value of affordable coverage.

We set out to learn: How to talk with Trump voters - understanding the change and disruption they seek, how they feel about potential cuts to Medicaid, and whether they've thought about cuts to healthcare and coverage at all.

Here are the results.

The Research



We went into the field with a three-part research project:

**Block Grant Digital
RCT Test**

15,185 Likely Republican Voters

Dec. 9-12, 2024

**QualBoards
(online discussions)**

36 Republican voters

Dec. 17-18, 2024

Focus Groups

28 Trump Voters

Jan. 15-16, 2025

- 2 groups with voters 40+
- 1 group with voters under 40
- 1 group with young men of color

The (Message) Strategy



It's going to take **all of us** to stop these cuts – and we see two fronts.

1. **IMMEDIATE:** Stop these cuts. Sow doubt that current proposals are the way to go. Protect Medicaid funding.
2. **LONG-GAME:** Define Medicaid and educate key stakeholders on the value of coverage.

This moment requires framing these cuts as: **“taking healthcare away from people.” Period.**

It requires messages specific to the current threats to Medicaid – while continuing to remind people what Medicaid is and who it's for.

Keep it Simple & Focused on Cuts



1. Drive home the **enormous size** [\$2.5 trillion] and **rushed nature** of these cuts.
2. Be clear about **who will bear the burden of these cuts** and **who will be harmed most**. Our research suggests it's best to start with seniors in long-term care, followed by children, people with disabilities, and low-income working families.
3. **Don't defend the status quo** – acknowledge frustration with government inefficiency, healthcare costs, and a system that doesn't work for them.

TIP: Avoid talking about “waste, fraud, and abuse” where you can. There is little we can do to move people away from strongly-held beliefs about the system's inefficiencies and faults – so don't introduce them into the conversation. *(more on this later)*

Block Grant Digital Test



We kicked off this research in December 2024 with a **Rapid Digital RCT Test** with **15,185 Republican voters** to determine which **messages grew opposition to block grants**.

Respondents were told:

"Congress is considering turning Medicaid into block grants to cut federal spending. Medicaid is health insurance for low-income children, parents, seniors and people with disabilities. Block grants would mean each state gets a set amount of money for their Medicaid program based on a formula."

Then: We asked whether or not they support turning Medicaid into block grants.

Baseline opposition: **68.9% of respondents** in our control group said they do not want Medicaid to be turned into block grants before receiving messaging.

Note: When support starts this high, movement of a percentage point or two is significant.

Block Grant Test Results



Title	Message	Block Grant Opposition
Nursing Care & Loved Ones	...But block grants would slash funding for long term home and nursing care while raising costs on those caring for their loved ones. Families across America are already struggling with the high costs of caring for their loved ones and our aging population. Medicaid block grants would make it worse.	+ 9.7%
Cost of Uncompensated Care	...But block grants would mean millions of Americans losing their health coverage – and we'll all pay the price. Fewer insured people means more uncompensated care, leading to higher costs across the whole system.	+ 9.1%
Take Care Away	...At a time when healthcare costs are already skyrocketing, cuts to Medicaid would take care away from those who need it most.	+ 9.0%
State Government Responsibility	...But block grants would only cut federal spending. Those costs will become the responsibility of state governments. This would bust state budgets, leaving them with fewer resources for other priorities like K-12 schools and public safety while raising state taxes on residents.	+ 8.4%

Block Grant Test Results

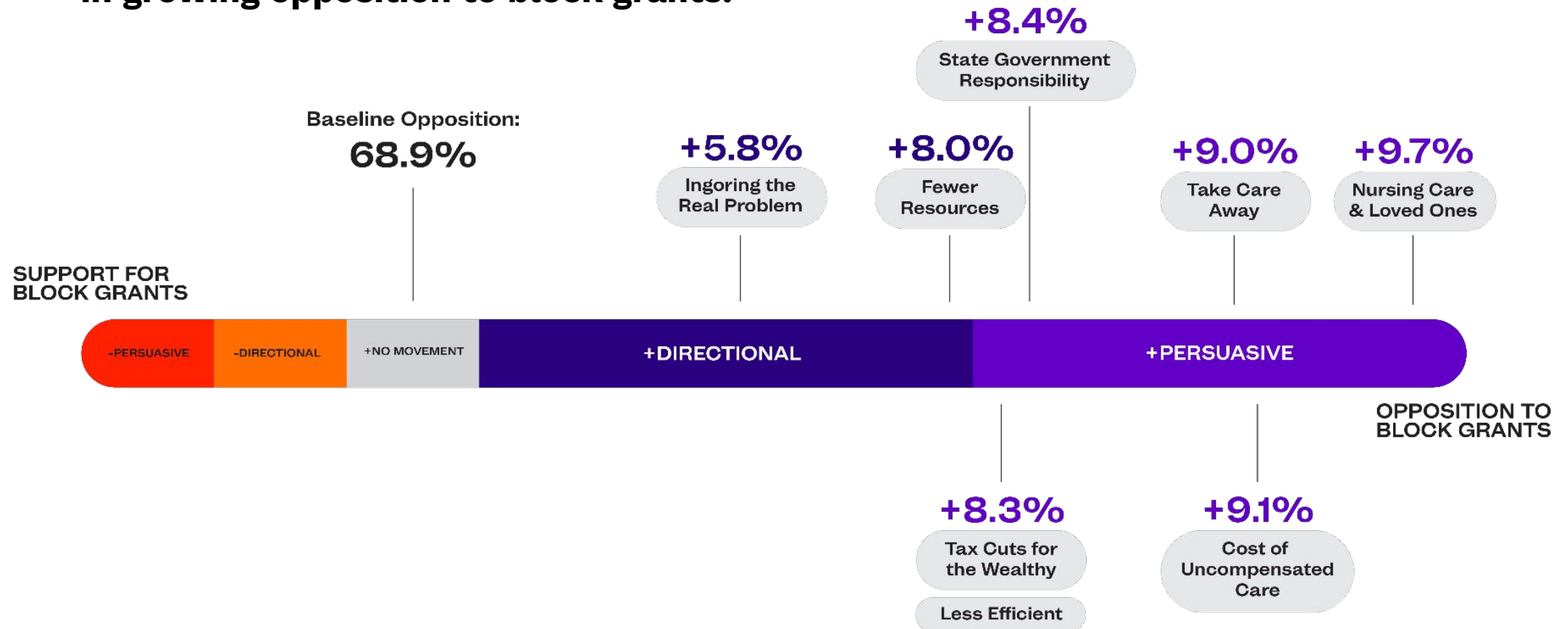


Title	Message	Block Grant Opposition
Less Efficient	...Congress is claiming that block grants will make Medicaid more efficient – but instead, block grants would increase the administrative burden – and create a slower system with more red tape, that costs more, and covers less people.	+ 8.3%
Tax Cuts for Wealthy	...Then, with the money they save on these spending cuts, Congress will pass tax cuts for the wealthy on the backs of low-income families.	+ 8.3%
Fewer Resources/ Pitting Against Each Other	...But state governments won't be able to fill the gap left by turning Medicaid into block grants, pitting seniors, children, and people with disabilities against each other for fewer resources.	+ 8.0%
Ignoring the Real Problem	...We have a healthcare cost problem, not a Medicaid problem. Congress is ignoring the real problem – the skyrocketing cost of healthcare set by hospitals, drug companies, and insurers.	+ 5.8%

Block Grant Digital Test



**All of the messages we tested were successful
in growing opposition to block grants.**



Defending Medicaid

Research Insights from
QualBoards & Focus Groups

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Our Purpose

To gain insights from **Trump voters** about their views on proposed federal spending cuts, particularly to Medicaid, and what messages are effective in growing opposition to these cuts.



Our Questions

- Mood and mindset pre-inauguration? What changes do they seek?
- Experience with cost of living/financial challenges?
- Feelings about:
 - Role of government
 - Medicaid
 - \$5+ trillion in federal budget cuts
- **Specific reactions to Medicaid funding cuts & how they respond to our messages**



Trump Voters: Mood & Mindset

- Trump voters are hopeful about the new administration. They believe **Donald Trump cares about the “Average Joe”** and will make changes that benefit the middle class.
- They believe these changes will mean more **money in their pocket**, lower their costs, and do something about illegal immigration. They acknowledge **there could be temporary suffering as change happens**.
- Healthcare isn't their top issue – but it is still important to them. The main problem they see with healthcare is cost: **it's just not affordable for most**.
- They see the healthcare system as broken, but don't hear leaders talking about solutions – and that includes Trump.



Trump Voters: Government

- Many Trump voters see government as trying to **control** them – telling them what to do, how to think.
- BUT they see a **role for government in reducing healthcare costs** and protecting them from corporate price gouging.
- They believe there is a lot of waste, inefficiency, and corruption in government, and **you can't convince them otherwise.**
- There is knee-jerk support for cuts to **government agencies and workers**, but they don't think about cuts in terms of **specific programs like Medicaid.**
- Most support government helping the “truly needy” – but many put conditions on who should get help.



Trump Voters: Medicaid

- Trump voters believe Medicaid is important.
- They say they don't know much about it – yet many seem to know beneficiaries.
- They feel there is lots of **waste, fraud, and abuse**.
- Many also believe **non-citizens** (or, as they say it, “illegal immigrants”) **are enrolled**.
- They want to see improvements or **changes to Medicaid, even those that would limit eligibility** to the truly needy... but they don't necessarily agree on who that is.

How They Prioritize Beneficiaries

top [Seniors
Children
People with disabilities

middle [Pregnant women

lower [Low-income workers



Key Takeaways: Cuts

1. Explain that **half of planned budget cuts are coming from healthcare programs**. This is not what Trump voters were expecting or necessarily what they want.
2. Describe cuts as **rushed** and convey they will be sweeping, indiscriminate, and **affect everyone**. Even if they support cuts, they want them done carefully.
3. Say that you **can't make cuts this big without hurting those who need it most**. These voters want to believe cuts will only impact those who shouldn't have Medicaid (in their opinion) – i.e., people who can work and non-citizens.
4. Frame cuts as **[\$2.5 trillion] coming out of Medicaid or one-third of Medicaid funding over 10 years**. But they want back-up that these numbers are real – not just assertions from the left.



Key Takeaways: Who Medicaid is For

1. Call out **seniors in nursing homes** and **children** when talking about who will be impacted by budget cuts and likely lose Medicaid.
2. Point out that these **cuts don't improve healthcare or lower your costs**.
3. Define Medicaid as **health insurance for seniors in nursing homes, low-income children and parents, pregnant women, and people with disabilities**. They don't know this, and we should assume they understand little about the program.
4. Tell them that an adult with Medicaid probably **earns less than \$30,000 a year**. Many were struck by how low this is.



Challenges & Roadblocks

- Responding to assertions that fraud and abuse in Medicaid are widespread. They rejected the data we shared.
- Pointing out that budget cuts will take healthcare away from low-income people in order to pay for **tax cuts for the wealthy**. Some felt it sounded like a familiar and biased liberal argument. Others believed they would still benefit from tax cuts even if true. **However, this works with progressives.**
- Describing potential cuts as **large** and **sweeping** without giving specifics. It was essential that we used the “\$2.5 trillion” or “one-third of Medicaid” funding numbers. Even then, some did not believe it.
- Countering their assumption that **there must be a good reason for Trump to make these cuts** and that it is probably about reducing waste and abuse. Some held onto this idea through the entire focus group.



Challenges & Roadblocks

- Punching holes in their belief that **Donald Trump won't really make these cuts to Medicaid** when it comes down to it because it would affect too many people. This causes some to see our arguments as exaggerated.
- These voters are hyper aware of language they feel is “leftist” and reject it immediately. Some **suspected bias even in neutral statements**. The argument about “tax cuts for the wealthy,” for example, made them feel these statements came from political, liberal organizations.
- Showing that **budget cuts will impact them too, even if they don't have Medicaid**. Taking coverage away from seniors came closest since so many middle class people have parents in nursing homes paid for by Medicaid. But arguments about their own healthcare costs rising or hospitals closing were less intuitive and likely need more explanation.



A Note on Waste, Fraud, Abuse

- Almost all Trump voters believe waste, fraud, and abuse are **widespread** in Medicaid. They can't be convinced otherwise.
- They think it mainly takes the form of **people getting Medicaid who are either non-citizens or who should be working and buying their own insurance**. Some bring up prices set by the healthcare industry as an example of waste.
- **Mythbusting and providing facts doesn't work** - they distrust data that suggests abuse/fraud by individual beneficiaries is low.
- On the flip side, they readily believe numbers that exaggerate or overstate individual abuse/fraud.



Define Medicaid & Who It's For

*“Medicaid is health insurance for **seniors in nursing homes, low-income children and parents, pregnant women, and people with disabilities.**”*

Other things to say:

- Many adults with Medicaid are very low income - making **less than around \$30,000** a year for a family of 3.
- These are people **who don't get insurance from their job, and can't afford to pay out of pocket for medical care or buy insurance.**
- They are **moms with young children, caregivers**, Uber drivers, delivery people, waitstaff.
- Even some healthcare workers have coverage through Medicaid.



Lean into “Rushed” Cuts

“ We understand there are difficult budget decisions to make, **but these cuts are being rushed**. Making big cuts in a **hurry** to healthcare programs that cover lots of **seniors, children**, and people who need healthcare is a bad idea. ”

What Worked:

- “Rushed” makes it clear these cuts are hurried, not thought-out.
- Even if they support cuts, Trump voters want them done carefully – only impacting those who shouldn’t be getting Medicaid (in their opinion).
- It names populations they want to protect.



Point Out These Cuts Will Raise Their Costs

*“ We need to improve healthcare and **make it more affordable**. Right now, **greedy corporations** are running our system and driving up prices to make more profit. **Cutting seniors and children from healthcare programs** won’t make healthcare more affordable and will just raise costs for everyone. ”*

What Worked:

- Refocuses on a healthcare issue they care about – affordability.
- Taps their frustration with corporate greed driving up their costs.
- Names vulnerable populations.
- Rightly points out that cuts won’t reduce their own healthcare costs and could actually raise them.



Focus on “Taking Healthcare Away”

“
*We can’t get to **\$2.5 trillion in cuts to Medicaid** without **taking healthcare away from** the very people the program was intended to protect: **seniors, children, and people with disabilities.**”*

What Worked:

- Bigger than Medicaid – it will result in taking **healthcare** away from people.
- Emphasizes the size of cuts and forces them to see groups they care about are likely to lose healthcare.
- Use “they want to cut Medicaid funding by one-third over the next 10 years” if \$2.5 trillion does not register.
- Names groups they care about.



Emphasis on Abandoning Seniors

“Cutting Medicaid means **abandoning seniors** and bankrupting families. Older Americans have **paid into the system** their whole lives and have earned our support.

Medicaid covers **long term care like home care and nursing homes**. Cutting funding would mean **taking critical care away from those who need it the most** – and leaving their loved ones to pay the price.”

What Worked:

- It's about impacts on seniors, a group they raise on their own and remain focused on.
- Brings in long-term and nursing home care, which they know isn't affordable for most people.
- Focuses on the way Medicaid helps middle class families – paying for long-term care.
- “Paid into the system” is powerful.

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Emphasis on Children Losing Critical Services

“*Children rely on Medicaid for a healthy start. Medicaid helps **1 in 3 kids** get **early screening and detection services** so that developmental delays, behavioral issues, and health challenges like asthma can be managed. If there are big cuts to Medicaid, lots of **young children will likely lose these services.**”*

What Worked:

- It's about children, another group they prioritize.
- 1 in 3 is a lot of children.
- Focuses on early childhood development services – something these voters strongly support.



What We Still Need to Learn

- **How to show that Medicaid work requirements are not really about promoting work and only about taking healthcare away from hardworking people.** These Trump voters fundamentally agree with work requirements, and we haven't found messages that move them away from this idea.
- **How to correct disinformation about non-citizens abusing the system.** These voters are very focused on immigration and “non-citizens enrolled in Medicaid” comes up organically. We need to develop and test responses to this misinformed attack.
- **How to respond to waste, fraud, and abuse claims more effectively.** Trump voters use these terms frequently to describe what they view as undeserving people who have Medicaid. We need to find ways to rebut this idea since trying to prove the percent is low did not convince anyone.



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Comms Takeaways



- **In the short term: Keep it simple and focused on cuts.** Massive, rushed cuts. Seniors and children will lose the care they count on. Don't defend the status quo.
- **Think twice about language when talking with Trump voters.** Certain phrases are immediately clocked as "progressive" or "Democratic" – including "these cuts will pay for tax cuts for the wealthy."
- We are still searching for the best ways to correct their strongly held beliefs & bias about **waste, fraud, and abuse.**

What's Next for CCC?



- **Message Guides, Graphics, Impacts of Cuts by State, Strategy Spotlights!**
In your inbox over the next week or so.
- **Rapid Digital Testing: Work Requirements.** Deeper dive on messages that can help us push back – including with Dems.
- **More testing:** The best ways to correct their beliefs & bias about **waste, fraud, and abuse.**
- Building a **long term message arc** that connects cost, coverage, and health equity.



Discussion and Q&A



Thank You!

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