

Connecting Men to Missouri Medicaid

Insights and recommendations to reach and enroll uninsured men

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“[Men] have felt judged because they feel like ‘as a man’ they shouldn’t depend on government assistance.”

Men—across demographics—make up a large portion of Missourians that are uninsured and eligible for Medicaid coverage. Organizations across Missouri working to connect more people to health coverage have identified distinct logistical, cultural, and societal barriers to reaching and enrolling men in Missouri Medicaid.

Through one-on-one interviews and an online survey with Medicaid outreach specialists, themes and insights emerged that inform outreach strategies to engage men and overcome persistent challenges. The takeaways reflect the specialists’ deep experience conducting Medicaid outreach in diverse communities and across the state. Below are learnings, recommendations, and messaging to inform outreach efforts.



Insights from the field:

Most men...

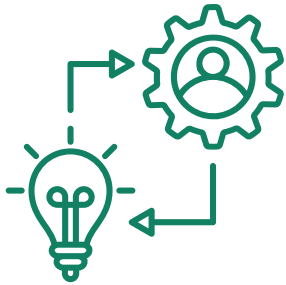
- **Are hesitant to ask for help.** Their reasons range from being ashamed to get financial help or assistance navigating the enrollment process, to being too prideful or believing they will be looked down upon if they use available help, and holding a stigma around using Medicaid and government assistance.
- **Assume they do not qualify for Medicaid.** Men tend to believe Medicaid is just for children, women, people with a disability, the elderly, or unemployed individuals. These perceptions are carryovers from previous eligibility limits, before Missouri expanded Medicaid in 2021. Men also believe that having a job or the ability to work precludes someone from Medicaid.
- **Do not think they need—or believe they can delay—medical care.** Many men will not seek out care unless they have a serious illness or accident, as it is important to maintain an image of being “macho” and “tough.”
- **Do not trust government services.** There is distrust in government assistance because of fear around negative consequences. These include believing that accessing services could affect their immigration or child custody status.
- **Are more receptive when they are with a partner or family.** While men see themselves as the providers for their families, many rely on the women in their lives to handle health insurance. Men are more likely to attend outreach events and seek out help with their spouse/partner or to support their children, making single men harder to reach
- **Feel more comfortable with male staff.** Some men are more receptive to male outreach workers. Men may be less guarded and more open to discussing personal and sensitive topics, like finances and health, with someone they perceive as relatable.



“A lot of men think most services are for women and children, which makes it more difficult to reach single men.”



Recommendations



Approach

- **Focus on facts:** Specifically state that men qualify for Medicaid, including single men, men with children, and people who work. Emphasize Missouri Medicaid is free or low-cost health insurance. Some men may even be drawn to the fact that they've already contributed to Medicaid through taxes. Include income thresholds to reinforce that working Missourians qualify.
- **Highlight the importance of their personal health:** Remind men that taking care of themselves allows them to take care of their families, their communities, and be productive at work. Outline benefits like doctor visits and dental care, and communicate that care through Missouri Medicaid can provide the services they need to treat existing or undiagnosed health issues. Convey that emergency care is covered, and by having Missouri Medicaid they can avoid major medical costs and even bankruptcy, further protecting their family.
- **Translate government language:** Although many people struggle with reading and understanding government language, men are less willing to ask questions which can prevent them from applying or lead them to abandon an application. Get ahead of the potential for shame and let them know your job is to explain everything, even if they don't ask for it.
- **Reassure privacy and build trust:** Men can be hesitant to discuss personal topics like finances and their health. Build trust by being patient and showing progress as you move through the application process. Reiterate that their personal information is protected and will only be used for the purpose of applying to Medicaid. Outreach workers who are not men can share other relatable information, such as a personal experience with similar services or statistics explaining how many men in the community are covered.

“Right away it was difficult to be relatable because we were not Black men. They wanted to see a man in front of them gaining their trust that way.”



Recommendations



Outreach Tactics

- **Collaborate with partners that offer other services:** Identify organizations in your community that already draw men in. These can include job centers or other employment support entities, residential reentry centers or substance use prevention programs, and shelters for unhoused individuals. Men interacting with these services are in the process of applying for other programs and collecting relevant documents and information pertinent to a Medicaid application.
- **Make sure men see themselves, or people like them, getting covered:** Share experiences of men with Missouri Medicaid to overcome misperceptions about eligibility. This could include stories or imagery. Consider featuring content showing a whole family being covered, as well as single men and working men.
- **Ensure materials are representative:** Use images of men and diverse communities in communications materials like flyers and social media graphics. Use gender-neutral colors to help counter assumptions and stereotypes. Translate materials to the languages that best serve your community.
- **Plan for multiple touchpoints to reach men:** Events like health fairs, job fairs, back-to-school nights, and holiday celebrations are good opportunities to build awareness of Missouri Medicaid broadly. Hanging flyers in places where men naturally gather—such as gas stations serving coffee or lunch in rural areas—can be an unexpected place to get their attention. It will take continued follow-up to motivate men to apply.

“[I tell them]
it’s just health
insurance.”

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“Once we
complete
a task for a
client, that
is a good
way to gain
trust because
it shows we
are true
to our word.”



Recommendations



Messages

Cater your communications to men with specific messages that address their questions and concerns and motivate them to apply.

- Stay strong and stay healthy with a free or low-cost health plan through Missouri Medicaid, also known as MO HealthNet. Taking care of yourself lets you to take care of your family, do your part in your community, and do good work.
- Missouri Medicaid is for Missouri men. Whether you are working, studying, caregiving, or in need of care, Missouri Medicaid is here for you. Get a free or low-cost health plan that covers prescriptions, emergency services, dental care, and more.
- Free or low-cost health insurance through Missouri Medicaid puts health care within reach. When you are covered, you don't have to choose between your health and taking care of your family. You can get the care you need without going bankrupt from medical bills.
- Accidents happen. With health insurance through Missouri Medicaid, you can be prepared for the unexpected and know that you won't go into debt from big medical bills.
- From preparing for your first job to taking over the family business, Missouri Medicaid offers free or low-cost health insurance for Missouri workers.

For more resources to reach all Missourians, go to mffh.org/Medicaid

“Some have trouble reading or comprehending information but won’t admit it. It helps when I offer to translate ‘government speak’ for them, and I make sure they know that they can ask questions. It helps make them comfortable...”