



INDEPENDENCE  
INCLUSION  
INNOVATION

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TO: Representative Brenda Landwehr and Members of the Special Committee on Medicaid Expansion  
FR: Nick Wood, Associate Director, InterHab  
RE: Support for Expansion of Medicaid in Kansas

Chair Landwehr and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share information on behalf of the member organizations of InterHab. Our members serve Kansans with intellectual and developmental disabilities in every part of the state.

InterHab has consistently testified in support of expanding Medicaid up to the 138% limit under the Affordable Care Act for many years now. We believe the legislature must move forward without further delay. Although expansion may not directly expand access to health care for the people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are served by our members, there is another important and direct benefit. The higher limit would make health care affordable for the thousands of dedicated but low-paid workers who help Kansans with disabilities with daily tasks like dressing, housekeeping, toileting and participating in their communities just like everyone else does.

Kansas is currently suffering from severe shortage of Direct Service Professionals (DSPs) all over the state and for every human service need. They may love what they do but DSPs need health care to stay in their jobs. The high cost of health care (and going without health care) often causes DSPs to have to look for other work. It's a big problem for us as a system. Even if more funding were available to address the HCBS waiting list, capacity issues caused by staff shortages and staff turnover is a consistent barrier to expanded HCBS services. All Kansans with intellectual and developmental disabilities deserve a home in the community, but without our DSPs, we literally cannot serve more people.

Medicaid rates are such that direct service workers are paid an average of about \$10 or \$11 an hour. If they are offered health care through their employers, it is generally costly for them and their employer both. Nationally, labor statistics suggest that a million more direct care staff are needed by 2024 to join a field that has long been plagued by low wages and is often physically demanding work. Added to this, the work force is generally getting older and has a higher need for health care due to their collective age.

We are glad to support the work of this committee and look forward to seeing a clean and straightforward expansion bill pass through the legislature this year.