



**National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society**

November 6, 2019

Chairwoman Brenda Landwehr
Special Committee on Medicaid Expansion
Re: Medicaid Expansion

Chairwoman Landwehr and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society regarding Medicaid Expansion, which expands eligibility for KanCare to those that live below 138% of the Federal Poverty Level. The National MS Society believes this will have a significant, positive impact on many, including Kansans living with and affected by multiple sclerosis. That positive impact comes in the form of increased access to healthcare and prescription medication, both of which are essential elements of MS care.

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system. MS interrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body. Symptoms range from numbness and tingling to blindness and paralysis. While each individual with MS is impacted differently by the disease, a growing body of evidence indicates that early and ongoing treatment with a disease modifying therapy (DMT) is the best way to modify the course of the disease, prevent the accumulation of disability, and protect the brain. Ongoing access to these medications is essential for people with MS to be able to live their best lives.

MS is considered a pre-existing condition. It is an expensive disease that lasts a lifetime. Most people are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50 and the average cost of living with MS, including both direct and indirect expenses (e.g. healthcare costs, lost wages), is upwards of \$70,000 per year, per person. It is recommended that people diagnosed with relapsing forms of MS begin treatment with a disease-modifying therapy as soon as possible after diagnosis. People with pre-existing conditions such as MS must be able to access continual health coverage and care because a delay or interruption of care for even a short period can result in disease progression and the loss of function that cannot be regained. However, health coverage is only accessible if it is affordable.

This is the seventh year that the Society has included KanCare Expansion as a policy priority within our Kansas advocacy mission. We keep coming back, because access to neurology care and life-changing prescription medications has been proven to slow disease progression, number and severity of relapses, and loss of function. KanCare expansion would improve this access for Kansans living with MS.



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The people in the “KanCare Gap” include college students living with MS, like Marcelline Dover was in 2015. Marcelline held three jobs while going to school at Wichita State University and yet, lacked health insurance because she was too low-income to afford a marketplace plan. More recently, I met a high school senior living with MS, Emma Hernandez. Emma attends the same school where Marcelline now teaches chemistry. Because she was under 18, Emma currently receives her MS health care through the KanCare program, but she worries about obtaining insurance that will see her through college as she faces aging out of her current coverage. Marcelline would have benefitted from the “hand up” that KanCare Expansion would have provided. Emma may soon face the same need.

Multiple sclerosis is a disease that impacts the entire family, and MS caregivers are also more likely to lack health insurance coverage due to time out of the workforce. These burdens and health risks can hinder caregivers’ ability to provide care, lead to higher healthcare costs and affect the quality of life of both the caregiver and care recipients. More than one-third of caregivers continue to provide intense care to others while suffering from poor health.

On behalf of all Kansans living with and affected by MS, I would like to respectfully urge the committee to support KanCare expansion. It is vital that people living with MS in Kansas are provided a similar possibility of health care access that is afforded to people living with MS in the 37 states that have opted for some form of expanded eligibility.

Sincerely,

Steffany Stern
Associate Vice President, Advocacy and Policy
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
Steffany.stern@nmss.org