Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

When Tragedy Strikes

Tom S. - Dayton, Ohio

That's Medicaid *shares stories of people covered by Medicaid at critical points in their lives, underscoring the importance of stable health insurance coverage in building a Culture of Health.*

Long before he enrolled in Medicaid, **Tom** was familiar with the health insurance system—he was a highly successful insurance agent with a college degree and a six-figure salary. But Tom's life was soon disrupted by family tragedy. Both of his parents died in a car accident, and his sister lost her battle with cancer 16 days later. The resulting mental trauma caused him to lose his job and his home, and he eventually moved into a homeless shelter. "I went from living to surviving," he recalls.

Tom discovered he was eligible for Ohio's Medicaid program, and was approved for coverage within days. Medicaid helped Tom receive a diagnosis and treatment for kidney cancer, and therapy sessions to address his anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. The mental health care he received, Tom said, also led to an improvement in his physical well-being. "For the first time in 20 years, I was happy," Tom said.

Tom is now back on his feet. He moved out of the homeless shelter into an apartment of his own, and he works full-time in the meat department at a local supermarket. Tom still carries his homeless shelter ID card with him to remind himself how far he's come.

"If I didn't have Medicaid, I wouldn't have been able to see a therapist and get treated for my mental health, and I wouldn't have received treatment for my cancer," said Tom. "Having that coverage is a real stress relief, and I receive quality care through Medicaid."