Since 1965, Medicaid has been a backbone of the U.S. health care system. The joint state-federal insurance program covers one in five Americans—including many elderly and disabled individuals and 40 percent of all U.S. children.

That’s Medicaid is a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation-led effort to share diverse stories of people who have been covered by Medicaid at critical points in their lives, underscoring the importance of stable health insurance coverage to a nationwide Culture of Health.

This booklet focuses on the role of Medicaid coverage in supporting individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. We look at a wide range of stories, from individuals who lost employer-sponsored insurance to front-line workers to those providing services for their community. These stories show the different experiences of how Medicaid has been beneficial during this public health emergency.

Each of these stories represents a unique example of how Medicaid coverage has been valuable in many people’s lives. We encourage you to use these stories as resources, and to check out the full collection of stories and videos on www.ThatsMedicaid.org.
Susan was employed by the same business for 21 years. She did a little bit of everything—working behind the desk, book-keeping, accounting and plenty of other jobs.

But all that changed when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States.

As a result her company decided to make cuts and Susan was let go from her job just a few years away from being able to access Medicare services. Overnight she no longer had access to the insurance that covered the care she needed for her blood pressure problem and kidney disease.

“I can't go more than a week or so without feeling at risk due to my preexisting conditions,” she says.

Susan turned to the Rhode Island state insurance marketplace for help and was surprised to learn she qualified for Medicaid, which brought her such relief she broke into tears.

In just half an hour, she went from having no health insurance to support affording important medical care. Medicaid helped Susan get the care she needed and reduced a large stress from her life.

“I am so grateful Medicaid was there when I really needed it,” Susan says. “It's literally saving my life.”
A few months into Latrice’s pregnancy she found out her baby would be born with heart complications, and the family would need additional support—or go into extreme debt.

The news came in the first weeks of the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, further adding to the anxiety.

Latrice’s job at an early learning center provides her with health insurance and her 4-year-old daughter receives coverage through the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), but a Medicaid plan would provide the backstop to ensure the baby would receive the needed care after birth and in the first year of life.

Newborn Makayla was delivered in the early summer of 2020 and was quickly whisked to a children’s care unit, where a team of physicians preformed heart surgery.

When a hospital employee learned that Medicaid was providing coverage for the baby, Latrice was reassured that all the paperwork was in order and that her only responsibility was to get rest.

“That gave me a great relief knowing that she was covered and she was safe, and that wasn’t another stressor on top of all these medical issues,” Latrice says.

Makayla is home now and Medicaid will provide medication, nursing assistance, doctor visits, medical equipment, and nutrition information before she joins her sister on CHIP assistance after her first birthday.

“Medicaid has literally been a lifesaver for my daughter,” Latrice says.

Watch: Latrice’s story in her own words
As a result of his autism, Nicholas requires some extra assistance with daily activities such as cleaning, cooking, and exercising. But that hasn't stopped him from living a full, independent life.

Nicholas is a proud COVID-19 front-line worker who arrives early in the morning three days a week at his job in a grocery store to stock shelves and ensure customers have the food they need.

“I'm happy that I've been able to do important work during the pandemic for people in my community,” Nicholas says. “Keeping people fed seems like something small I can do, and it has helped me feel less anxious this year.”

Nicholas lives on his own, and he credits Medicaid with helping to make that possible. A waiver program covers all of his caretakers and provides him with transportation to and from his job. He credits this freedom with giving him a sense of direction.

“It's been life-changing. I was so anxious and a bit aimless after high school, and so getting to be independent gave me joy, confidence, and freedom,” Nicholas says.

With necessary services covered Nicholas is able to take part in a wide range of activities in his community, from his job to a book club to yoga. His wish is that others can find a similar path toward independence.

“I think the message I want to convey is hope,” Nicholas says. “Medicaid benefits allowed hope for a more independent and adult future than I could have achieved alone. And I'm so grateful.”
When Leah was growing up her parents were self-employed and the family did not have health insurance. As a result, during a particularly hard financial period for the family, her mother did not receive care that could have caught cancer early.

“If you have no money to pay a doctor bill, you just don't go,” Leah says.

Leah’s mother managed to live a few years after a melanoma diagnosis, but passed away before she could experience Leah’s college graduation, attend Leah’s wedding, or spend time with all of her grandchildren.

This experience inspired Leah to ensure the members of her community—most of whom are on Medicaid—receive the support they need.

After many years of learning about the nation’s health care system, Leah is now a leader at a local nonprofit that is almost solely funded by private donations and serves “anyone who walks in the door.”

This results in helping her community with food assistance, mental health therapy, educational and career development, drug treatment, and anything else to support what is needed. Most recently that has been about 3,000 people a month who receive food from a mobile pantry and other supplies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I might not be able to fix everything for them, but I'll point them in the right direction,” Leah says. “I have long-established trust with generations of families.”

Leah has seen the negative health outcomes for people in her community who lack Medicaid, and knows the basic health services it provides are crucial for her friends and neighbors.

“Here in our community, it is life and death,” she says. “When you are in a rural area and parents are getting by day-to-day, if they don't have coverage they don't seek health care until it is too late. So having that health coverage makes a huge difference.”
When Noah began a prestigious fellowship in 2019 teaching English in Colombia, he expected to have health insurance for the duration of his participation. But when the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly cut short the program, he returned to the United States without a job or health insurance.

“I was already acutely aware of the importance of having health insurance,” says Noah. “But with COVID-19, I knew it was especially important right now.”

Noah was able to quickly sign up for coverage through his state’s Medicaid program, signing up days before he would have become too old to stay on his parents’ plan. He has only been enrolled in the program for a short time, but it has already brought him peace of mind during a difficult time.

“It’s been a huge weight off my shoulders, especially with the health crisis that’s going on,” Noah says. “Without insurance I probably would not have been totally honest with myself in acknowledging potential symptoms. Now if something were to happen, I know I’m not going to financially damage my family.”

Watch: Noah’s story in his own words