

Daniels Op Ed  
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In the past few weeks, information has been distributed that inaccurately states more than 130,000 Tennesseans will lose their TennCare benefits and be left without any health care coverage. I would like to take this opportunity to set the record straight and provide an accurate and more complete explanation of TennCare's efforts to ensure that only those who legally qualify for TennCare continue to receive taxpayer-funded health coverage.

This January a federal court lifted an injunction placed on the Bureau of TennCare more than 20 years ago that prevented the state from regularly re-verifying whether certain enrollees still qualify for coverage. This case, known as Daniels, involves re-determining eligibility for individuals who once received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) but have had their benefits terminated by the Social Security Administration. With the lifting of this injunction, the Bureau is now required to check the eligibility of approximately 154,000 people who have not been re-verified, some for as many as 20 years. This re-verification process is in no way a change in who is eligible for Tennessee's Medicaid program; we have the same open eligibility categories today as we did before the injunction was lifted. Instead, it simply allows the Bureau to make sure that only those who qualify for coverage remain on the program.

Like all other state Medicaid programs, TennCare has a federally mandated responsibility to re-verify enrollees on a regular basis, and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has approved the process we will be using for re-verification of the Daniels class. This is the same multi-phase process we use everyday to check the eligibility of our more than 1.1 million other TennCare enrollees. Currently, we know more than 106,000 of these individuals in the Daniels class will continue to qualify for comprehensive government-sponsored health insurance, either through TennCare or Medicare. As for the remaining 44,000 individuals in the class, we are asking for updated personal information through our re-verification process to help determine whether they may qualify in another TennCare category. Those who continue to meet eligibility requirements will remain on the program.

While it is our responsibility to provide Medicaid coverage for Tennesseans who qualify for the TennCare program, it is also our responsibility to all taxpayers in this state to make sure the individuals receiving services actually qualify for them. While we can't predict the exact number at this time, we do know that some individuals in the Daniels class will no longer be eligible for Medicaid services. These individuals include enrollees who have moved to other states, have had health improvements that allow for gainful employment with possible access to employer-sponsored health insurance, or have increased their income to a level that no longer qualifies them for coverage. This re-verification process will simply allow us to remove those individuals who no longer qualify for the program, continue coverage for those who provide us with updated information that shows they are eligible for the program, and allow us to ensure the state's limited financial resources are used appropriately.

The TennCare program offers quality medical, behavioral, pharmacy and long-term care coverage for all of our members, and a large portion of Tennesseans have access to this benefit. A recent *New York Times* article ranked Tennessee ninth in the nation for coverage of our state's population. Forty-nine percent of our poor uninsured adults and 83 percent of our poor uninsured children have government-sponsored health care. Our coverage of poor uninsured children alone puts us in the top 10 states in the country. As we continue to re-verify the Daniels population and provide continued coverage to those eligible, we remain thankful that TennCare is in a position to provide quality coverage to more than a million Tennesseans who qualify for our program.

Darin Gordon is the Director of the TennCare Bureau and Deputy Commissioner for the Department of Finance and Administration.