

# Tennessee Health Care Campaign Anticipates Budget Scare

By A.J. Dugger III



Brad Palmertree is the Statewide and Online Organizer for The Tennessee Health Care Campaign

The Tennessee Health Care Campaign issued a press release on July 11, 2011 to alert Tennesseans about the negotiations of possible federal budget cuts to Medicare and Medicaid. If allowed, these cuts would affect the lives of many senior citizens, children, and people with disabilities. "Making cuts to medicare, medicaid and the social security program is not the way the American people want to handle this," said Tony Garr, policy director of THCC. "We were concerned about some of the proposals that we were hearing about."

Undoubtedly, the proposed cuts would have a big effect on many Tennesseans. "Almost half of all births in Tennessee are covered by TennCare, and over 700,000 children depend on TennCare in order to see a doctor when they get sick," Garr continued. "Slashing the federal budget for Medicaid would have a devastating effect not just on low-income families and people with disabilities that rely on TennCare, but to the hospitals that will continue to treat them in emergency rooms and the

local governments and taxpayers that will make up the difference." The proposed cuts would likely reduce the pay of doctors, nurses and hospitals. "Federal cuts of the magnitude being proposed will have a ripple effect throughout our health care system. That is why we are standing together," said Beth Uselton, executive director of THCC.

Brad Palmertree, the statewide and online organizer for THCC, was shocked when he heard the news. "This would affect a lot of people," he told the Tennessee Tribune. "It isn't a direct impact on people just receiving these services, but it's also a larger residual economic issue that we're facing."

"All public programs are in jeopardy right now, but many politicians are eyeing Medicaid as a bargaining chip because TennCare beneficiaries are seen to have less political clout," said Uselton. "We were concerned that the republicans were only looking at one approach, and that was to cut," said Garr.

Though the deadline is August 2, there is currently no plan of action to take if the cuts occur. "It was hard to know what the game plan would be when we never really knew when the cuts would be. It was a major concern on our part," explained Garr. "The only thing we can do is educate as many people as we can to let them know that they have a voice in these matters, and their voice counts," added Palmertree.

According to the recent press release, there are 1.2 million people on TennCare in Tennessee. 700,000 of these people are children. There's 1 million people on Medicare, and over 200,000 are dual-eligible, which means that they have both Medicare and TennCare.

The press release ended with the following quote from THCC. "Together, with a strong coalition of organizations that care for our most vulnerable neighbors, we are urging our congressional delegation to stand up for a fair, balanced approach to the deficit that does not pay our country's bills by inflicting crushing costs on seniors, families, children and people with disabilities while asking nothing of those who can most afford to pay their fair share."