

Health Care in Motion

Timely, Substantive Updates on Policy Shifts · Actionable Advocacy to Protect Health Care

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Ballot Box Activism: Flex Your Muscles in the Mid-Term Elections

Voters have many important decisions to make on Tuesday, November 6, and these decisions will affect access to health care in a wide range of ways. In addition to participating in [elections](#) for federal and state legislators, governors, and other public officials, voters in many states have an opportunity to [rise up](#) and enact important statewide public policies through ballot measures. (Except for voters who are [blocked](#) from exercising their constitutional rights because they are not able to [overcome ID requirements](#) and similar barriers.)

Known in some states as “propositions” or “questions,” a ballot measure is a piece of legislation that is approved or rejected by eligible voters. Importantly, ballot initiatives are not always progressive and can be worded in confusing or misleading ways. Medicaid expansion, transgender rights, and reproductive rights are among the issues that are being put to the people on November 6. **Please get out and vote if you are eligible—but take the time to know and understand what you’re voting for!** This issue of *Health Care in Motion* highlights some initiatives to get you started.

Medicaid Expansion

The residents of Maine made history when they enacted Medicaid expansion via Question 2 on the state’s November 2017 ballot. Hot on the heels of this inspiring ballot box activism, voters in Idaho ([Proposition 2](#)), Nebraska ([Initiative 427](#)), and Utah ([Proposition 3](#)) will all consider similar questions this year.

While Montana rolled out Medicaid expansion in 2016, voters this year are tasked with deciding whether to preserve expansion by approving a tobacco tax or to let it lapse at the end of the year ([Initiative 185](#)). Medicaid expansion in Montana has extended critical health care coverage to more than [90,000](#) people who were not eligible previously. 90,000 people is a lot of people, especially when you consider that the population of Montana is only about 1 million in total. The idea that this access could be clawed back is frustrating. Unfortunately, proponents of the initiative faces a powerful and predictable adversary in the [tobacco industry](#).

The Republican governors of some of these states seem to have learned from the experience of Maine’s Governor Paul LePage who illegally [attempted to block](#) expansion, despite the binding expression of the will of Maine’s citizens. Idaho’s outgoing conservative governor C.L. Otter recently announced his support for expansion and even appears in a [television advertisement](#) promoting the measure. Utah’s Governor Gary R. Herbert has [indicated](#) that he would not fight expansion if the measure passes.

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The people's push for Medicaid expansion in new states is especially uplifting considering the undercurrent that is otherwise restricting access. On October 31, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services [approved](#) Wisconsin's Medicaid waiver, which incorporates [work requirements](#).

Transgender Rights

In July 2016, Massachusetts enacted a state law that protects transgender people from discrimination in public places, including restaurants, stores, and doctors' offices. A "yes" vote on [Question 3](#) keeps the current law in place. A "no" vote would repeal this provision of the public accommodation law and roll back nondiscrimination protections.

This is the first statewide referendum (public vote) on transgender rights. State-level prohibitions on discrimination are especially critical in light of the Trump Administration's [attacks](#) on transgender rights at the federal level. Advocates have to hold the line. Without a resounding, "Yes on 3," Massachusetts will be moving backwards on equality along the lines of California's brush with [Proposition 8](#)—a 2008 measure that reintroduced marriage inequality and was deemed unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court.

Reproductive Rights and Access to Reproductive Health Care

Reproductive rights and access to reproductive health care are threatened by anti-abortion ballot initiatives in three states: Alabama, Oregon, and West Virginia.

A "yes" vote on Alabama's [Amendment 2](#) would amend the state's constitution to ensure that it cannot be read to secure or protect a woman's right to an abortion or the funding of abortion care. It would also recognize "the sanctity of unborn life and the rights of unborn children, including the right to life." Alabama already has a number of [laws](#) in place that severely limit access to abortion, and the Amendment paves the way for a total ban without regard to the situation.

A "yes" vote on Oregon's [Measure 106](#) would amend Oregon's constitution to prohibit the state from spending public funds on abortion. Currently, women who are insured under publicly-funded plans, such as the state's Medicaid program and the public employee benefit plan, can obtain abortions that are approved by a medical professional. West Virginia's [Amendment 1](#) would amend the state's constitution to ensure that nothing in it "secures or protects a right to abortion or requires the funding of abortion." That the West Virginia Constitution would not *require* the funding of abortion opens the door to banning public funding for abortion care.

Only [17 states](#) allow for Medicaid funds to be spent on abortions, and now the ballot measures in two such states threaten to exacerbate disparity in access. These measures enable a situation in which only those who can afford an abortion are able to access one. Is a right really a right if the most vulnerable among us are denied access to it?

Are there health-related ballot initiatives in your state that you want the country to know about? [E-mail us!](#)
Feeling inspired to put something on the next ballot to protect and/or advance health care access in your state?
We can help you understand your state's ballot laws. **And remember, please get out and vote if you are eligible— but take the time to know what you're voting for!**

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AIDSWatch

AIDSWatch Scholarship Deadline Extended!

AIDSWatch understands the energy and dedication needed for this Election Day. With this in mind, the AIDSWatch scholarship application deadline has been extended! Want to build upon your advocacy for the HIV community but are unable to afford the cost of attending AIDSWatch 2019? [AIDSWatch](#), the nation's largest constituent-based HIV/AIDS advocacy event, is accepting [online applications for scholarships here](#). Scholarships will cover hotel and travel accommodations. Join the hundreds of people living with HIV and their allies in Washington D.C. this upcoming spring and apply for a scholarship by November 16, 2018 at 8 pm ET!

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