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Behavioral Health Coalition Spotlights Medicaid Success Stories

COLUMBUS -- Two years ago, the Coalition for Healthy Communities stood together in support of efforts to ensure that low-income Ohioans living with mental health or addiction disorders have access to Medicaid. After witnessing the impact that Medicaid has had on so many lives, the Coalition is renewing its plea to lawmakers to continue making this health care coverage available.

Today, at a press conference at the Ohio Statehouse, individuals impacted by the expansion of Medicaid shared their personal and professional stories, including: Ben Ertel from Cincinnati, Pam Harris from Jamestown, Cindy Koumoutzis from North Canton.

“When my antidepressant stopped working a couple of years ago, I went into a deep depression and quit my job. When I could no longer afford the cost of COBRA and medication copays, I applied for and was approved for Medicaid. With the stress of paying my medical bills reduced and my depression under control, I was able to go back to work. On December 1st, I became insured through my new employer,” said Ben Ertel. “Without Medicaid, I would not be where I am today.”

Pam Harris shared her experience, “Since my mini stroke last year, I often wonder what I would have done if I did not have Medicaid. Without physical therapy, medications, and the help of a home health aide, I would not have been able to get well so I could care for my children, return to work, and pay my household expenses. Instead, my family and I would have had to rely on government services to meet our basic needs.”

“Having a child in college receive news that she was no longer eligible for health care benefits was something we never thought possible. PTSD, addiction and Hepatitis C disqualified her from existing coverage. Medicaid has since given her a second chance through addiction treatment, mental health services, medication-assisted treatment and preliminary testing for Hepatitis treatment. Without Medicaid she would no longer receive the treatment she needs and her conditions could become life threatening,” said Cindy Koumoutzis.

Joining Ben, Pam, and Cindy were Hancock County Sheriff Michael Heldman; Ron Adkins the Executive Director of the Gallia, Jackson, and Meigs Counties Board of Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Services; Bobbi Douglas the Executive Director of Liberty Center Connections in Wooster; and Alicia Bruce the Mercer County Common Pleas Drug Court Coordinator who all shared how the expansion of coverage has impacted their communities.

The Coalition for Healthy Communities calls on Ohio’s elected leaders to support Medicaid as a critical support that provides access to physical and behavioral health care and keeps over 450,000 Ohioans working, going to school and caring for their families. The Coalition for Healthy Communities is a consortium of 22 statewide organizations advocating for quality mental health and addiction services. It looks forward to showcasing more success stories during the upcoming budget hearings.

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