

## Medicaid enrollment drops

*New citizenship requirement might be cause*

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WASHINGTON — Ohio's Medicaid rolls have fallen since the state began enforcing a federal law that requires participants in the health-care program for the poor to prove they are U.S. citizens.

Although state officials have yet to officially cite the new federal law as the reason, nearly 22,000 fewer people were enrolled in Medicaid in December compared with the 1.758 million signed up in October. The state began to enforce the new law at the end of September.

Before September, the number of Ohioans enrolled in Medicaid had increased on a monthly basis.

The drop-off in Ohio is similar to declines reported in six other states: Kansas, Iowa, Louisiana, Virginia, New Hampshire and Wisconsin, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal Washington organization that focuses on federal and state budget decisions that affect low-income Americans.

"At this point, we can't specifically say it is the citizenship requirement," said Jon Allen, a spokesman for the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. "It certainly is a possibility. One of the things we need to do here is data analysis to pinpoint the reason why we saw the decrease we did."

Mary Wachtel, public policy director of Voices for Ohio's Children, said her organization is "convinced there is a link" between the new federal law and the enrollment drop.

"The only policy change that went into effect that affects Medicaid eligibility was the Medicaid citizenship rule," Wachtel said. "So I think it's fair to say we can attribute most of (that) to that change."

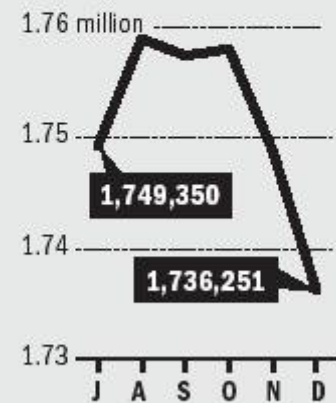
Wachtel said it is highly unlikely that county workers have been turning away illegal immigrants. Instead, she said it is more likely that longtime state residents are having difficulty providing the documentation they need to prove they are U.S. citizens. Those documents include a passport, an original copy of their birth certificate, a driver's license or a military identification card.

President Bush did not ask Congress to adopt the new citizenship requirement. But the House in 2005 inserted the requirement into a deficit-reduction measure. Before the law went into effect, people applying for Medicaid only had to declare they were citizens.

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### Dropping rolls

Medicaid signed up almost 22,000 fewer Ohioans in December than October. While the percentage is small, many advocates attribute the decline to new rules requiring proof of U.S. citizenship.



Source: Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

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