

Blood Cancer Advocates Celebrate Major State Policy Wins for Patients

It's important to celebrate the incredible wins the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society achieved at the state level in 2023.

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While Congress meets year-round, state legislatures typically meet only in the first half of the year. The start of the summer generally marks the end of the state sessions.

As LLS prepares for our 2024 state work, it's important to celebrate the incredible wins we achieved at the state level in 2023.

These policies are the culmination of years of work from volunteers and LLS staff from across the organization. We hope you'll take a moment to learn about them – and share them with your own stakeholders.

Protecting patients from medical debt

More than [4 in 10 Americans](#) have medical debt, which [can](#) cost patients their homes, limit their ability to feed their families, and even prevent them from getting further healthcare.

LLS continues to support the work states are taking to protect patients from medical debt. This year, Colorado became the [first state](#) to ban all medical debt from appearing on credit reports. New York is close to enacting a similar bill—in addition to protections the state passed last year preventing wage garnishments and liens due to medical debt. And that's on top of medical debt reform Arizona voters approved last November, which limits wage garnishment for medical debt and protects families from losing their homes and cars due to medical debt.

Making treatments affordable

After years of advocacy by LLS, Rhode Island is making prescription drugs more affordable. The legislature just passed a law that caps insured patients' out-of-pocket costs for specialty medications – which many cancer patients rely on – at \$150. In recent years, New Jersey, Illinois, and Minnesota all have passed similar legislation due in large part to LLS leadership.

Expanding Medicaid to more patients

North Carolina lawmakers voted to expand Medicaid this spring. The expansion will make 600,000 more people in the state eligible for affordable health coverage and offer them access to cancer screenings and treatment. The win follows [years of advocacy](#) from LLS volunteers and staff, including an in-person lobby day hosted by LLS last summer.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in New Hampshire decided to continue Medicaid expansion for seven more years. Michelle Lawrence, a longtime blood cancer advocate at LLS, [supported](#) the bill and shared with state lawmakers how Medicaid has helped her.

“For the first time in my cancer journey of almost 14 years, the primary focus is on my care, not my insurance and insurance costs,” she said. “The stress it alleviates is beyond words.”

These wins build on the momentum from other states. South Dakota voters expanded their Medicaid program in November, and LLS is currently working to ensure the program is funded and implemented as the voters intended.

Improving patients’ quality of life

In Minnesota, the state’s new Paid Family and Medical Leave Act provides time off for patients and caregivers—without jeopardizing their financial well-being. While the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requires companies to offer up to 12 weeks of unpaid job-protected leave for people with serious health issues, Minnesota’s new law provides up to 12 weeks of paid leave for patients with severe medical conditions like cancer—and the same amount to their caregivers. LLS also helped lead work in Minnesota that preserved funding for a state body that facilitates families’ access to palliative care.

In Utah, LLS helped pass legislation requiring insurance coverage of fertility preservation services. Fertility preservation is an essential part of cancer treatment for patients who may want to have their own biological children in the future—but oftentimes, it is not covered by insurance. The newly enacted law will help ensure that patients covered by Medicaid can preserve their future options, even if their cancer or treatment causes infertility.

Enabling more patients to access clinical trials

Historically, many groups face barriers to enrolling in clinical trials. These groups include people of color, younger patients, older patients, and patients living in rural areas.

Washington state just [passed a bill](#)—championed by LLS—to help ensure more equitable access to clinical trials. The bill makes Washington a leader in improving trial diversity—and provides a roadmap for other states who want to tackle the issue.

Protecting patients from harmful legislation

Medicaid is a safety net for patients with low-incomes. But some lawmakers want to require that beneficiaries of the program adhere to onerous requirements, like documenting a minimum number of work hours, to receive affordable healthcare. Many patients in active treatment or full-time caregivers simply can't meet these requirements. LLS advocated against—and successfully blocked—work requirements in several states this year, including Missouri and Iowa.

“Junk insurance” products masquerade as quality health coverage but discriminate against people cancer and often fail to cover serious medical care. LLS helped block bills in Connecticut, Maine, and Missouri that would have allowed for the proliferation of these harmful plans.

What's next?

We are proud of all we've accomplished in the 2023 state legislative sessions—and we're already looking forward to achieving even more in 2024.

Want to help? You can sign up to be an advocate [here](#). Once you do so, we'll let you know when your voice is needed to help create meaningful change for patients in your state.

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