

SOME PROVIDERS CANCELING TELEHEALTH AMID SHUTDOWN

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

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Some doctors and hospitals are refusing to treat many Medicare and Medicaid patients via telehealth, or charging them hefty fees, because the federal government shutdown is preventing reimbursement of video and audio health services.

"Medicare and Medicaid patients are unable to schedule new telehealth/video visits," NYU Langone, which operates two hospitals on Long Island along with outpatient practices, states on its website. NYU Langone said previously scheduled appointments will be honored.

Other health systems declined to say what their policies are.

Limiting access to telehealth could lead to more serious complications for patients, and hospitalizations, said Dr. David Jakubowicz, president of the Medical Society of the State of New York, which represents physicians statewide.

"It's another barrier to care," he said.

Some doctors are canceling telehealth appointments or charging patients, depending on what type of Medicare or Medicaid plan they have, Jakubowicz said.

"If a physician is not sure they're going to get paid for something or paid promptly for it, they may not elect to do those services," he said. "In order to pay your employees, you need a certain amount of revenue coming in."

At issue is a rule adopted during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic that greatly broadened Medicare and Medicaid coverage for telehealth, beyond what had been limited primarily to rural areas. The rule was routinely extended, but the latest version expired as of Oct. 1, the day the current shutdown began. Mental and behavioral health telehealth services can still be reimbursed.



A pandemic-era rule greatly broadened Medicare and Medicaid coverage for telehealth but expired with the federal shutdown.

Some insurers covering

Yet medical reimbursement continues for some insurance plans, said Wendy Darwell, president and CEO of the Suburban Hospital Alliance of New York State, which represents hospitals on Long Island and in the Hudson Valley.

About half of Medicare enrollees have insurance coverage via private companies, and many of those plans continue to cover telehealth, she said.

But the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services said it is placing a "temporary hold" on telehealth claims for those with traditional Medicare and certain types of privately run Medicare Advantage plans, and it's unclear whether the government will eventually pay providers, Darwell said.

"If you continue providing services, obviously you're at risk those services may never be reimbursed," she said.

Doctors' offices are sometimes unsure which patients they'll be reimbursed for seeing, said Jakubowicz, director of otolaryngology and allergy at Bronx-based Essen Health Care, where most patients have Medicaid, which is through private companies.

"The insurance companies are not giving us the guidance," he said. "The doctors need to call" insurance companies.

Some physicians are providing telehealth even if they don't know if they'll be reimbursed, he said.

Ilene Corina, of Wantagh, is a caregiver for her brother, who has cerebral palsy as well as

about 10 medical conditions. Two of his doctors said they would no longer cover telehealth — but when she called his Medicaid insurance company, the firm said it would pay for it, said Corina, president of the Pulse Center for Patient Safety, a Long Island-based patient advocacy group.

Her brother has only 50% lung capacity, and "it would be very dangerous" if he were to contract COVID-19, the flu or another infection while sitting in a waiting room instead of accessing care via telehealth. She said she plans to go back to the doctors to tell them what the insurance company said.

NYU Langone declined to elaborate on its website statement, including on whether the system would accept appointments from people whose insurance plans cover telehealth.

Other health systems

Northwell Health, the Island's largest health care provider, declined to comment beyond stating "we are still assessing the impacts."

Stony Brook Medicine said "telehealth has expanded access and supported countless families, and we strongly advocate for its swift restoration. In the meantime, our teams remain dedicated to providing seamless, high-quality care through in-person visits and community-based health care settings."

Catholic Health did not respond to requests for comments.

Feds to

Some food aid benefit for November to be released after judges' rulings

The Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — President Donald Trump's administration said Monday it will partially fund SNAP for November, after two judges issued rulings requiring the government to keep the nation's largest food aid program running.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, had planned to freeze payments starting this past Saturday because it said it could no longer keep funding it during the federal government shutdown. The program serves

about 1 in 8 Americans and is a major piece of the nation's social safety net. It costs more than \$8 billion per month nationally. The government said an emergency fund it will use has \$4.65 billion — enough to cover about half the normal benefits.

Exhausting the fund potentially sets the stage for a similar situation in December if the shutdown isn't resolved by then.

It's not clear exactly how much beneficiaries will receive, nor how quickly they will see value show up on the debit cards they use to buy gro-

2 LI food banks

BY OLIVIA WINSLOW
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For James Nolan, of Shirley, a TSA agent at Kennedy Airport who is not getting paid while he works during the federal government shutdown, it's the uncertainty that is uppermost in his mind.

Nolan, who was waiting in line Monday to get free food from Long Island's food banks, noted that Thanksgiving is coming and said: "We're kind of crossing our fingers that this will be over by then. If not, we're going to have to figure out what we're going to do."

He received a box of fresh fruits and vegetables and another of frozen chicken and ground turkey and shelf-stable food items during the first joint food distribution, conducted by Island Harvest and Long Island Cares — The Harry Chapin Food Bank, that was designated especially for furloughed and unpaid federal workers.

Nolan, 32, who "loves what I do," said by next week he will have missed two paychecks. So he was among scores in cars that lined up in the parking lot of Farmingdale State College on Monday for the food distribution hosted by the two food banks.

"It's tough putting food on the table," Nolan said. "Luckily

WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

■ Long Island food banks

Island Harvest and Long Island Cares — The Harry Chapin Food Bank joined forces for the first time Monday to distribute food aid to furloughed and unpaid federal workers during the government shutdown.

■ **104 federal workers** and 35 other people registered for the food distribution, according to Long Island Cares.

■ **The distribution** comes as the shutdown, begun Oct. 1, continues, closing in on one of the longest government shutdowns ever.

for me . . . my wife and I — we don't have kids. Still, we didn't have too much saved up, unfortunately, beforehand, so events like this definitely help out a lot because now I can afford to put gas in the car, instead of having to put food on the table."

First-time recipients

Jessica Valdes, 51, of Islip, said she is a civilian employee of the U.S. Army Reserve who has been furloughed. In her job as a family programs support assistant, "I normally connect our service

partially fund SNAP



ceries. November payments have already been delayed for nearly 42 million Americans.

“The Trump Administration has the means to fund this program in full, and their decision not to will leave millions of Americans hungry and waiting even longer for relief as government takes the additional steps needed to partially fund this

program,” Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell, who led a coalition of Democratic state officials in one of the lawsuits that forced the emergency funding, said in a statement.

The administration also provided an infusion to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which helps low-income mothers buy nutritious staples. WIC received an additional \$450 million in funding, according to a senior administration official who spoke Monday on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the decision publicly. Politico first reported on the WIC funding Monday afternoon.

Last month, some states

warned they had enough money to operate their WIC programs only until mid-November. The administration last month reallocated \$300 million in unspent tariff revenue to keep the program running.

People who receive the benefits are trying to figure out how to stretch their grocery money further.

Corina Betancourt, who lives in Glendale, Arizona, already uses a food bank sometimes to get groceries for herself and her three kids, ages 8 through 11. With her SNAP benefits reduced and delayed, she’s expecting to use the food bank more and find ways to stretch what she has further.

The administration said it would provide details to states Monday on calculating the per-

household partial benefit. The process of loading the SNAP cards, which involves steps by state and federal government agencies and vendors, can take up to two weeks in some states. But the USDA warned in a court filing that it could take weeks or even months for states to make all the system changes to send out reduced benefits. The average monthly benefit is usually about \$190 per person.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta said at a news conference that it would take his state about a week to load benefit cards once the funding is made available. “These are folks who are hungry, and every day matters,” Bonta said.

The liberal group Democracy Forward, which repre-

sented plaintiffs in one of the lawsuits, said it was considering legal options to force full SNAP funding.

Some high-profile Democrats are calling for the government to do that on its own. “USDA has the authority to fully fund SNAP and needs to do so immediately. Anything else is unacceptable,” Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said on social media.

Patrick Penn, deputy under secretary food nutrition and consumer services for USDA, said in a court filing Monday that the department chose not to tap other emergency funds to ensure there’s not a gap in child nutrition programs for the rest of this fiscal year, which runs through September 2026.

assist federal workers missing paychecks



Volunteers load vehicles at Monday’s food distribution led by Island Harvest and Long Island Cares.

members and military families with resources,” such as food banks like Long Island Cares.

Now Valdes said it’s her family who is in need of assistance, since neither she nor her husband — also a federal employee on the job as an essential worker — is getting paid. They are parents to two children, ages 5 and 10, she said.

Valdes said the food assistance helps “greatly, especially

when there is no income at this point,” adding she had “never” had to rely on food assistance before.

Another woman in line, who asked that her name not be used for fear of repercussions, said she is a furloughed worker at the Internal Revenue Service. She said, “I feel weird being here. I didn’t think I had to resort to this.” She added, “We’re just pawns. I feel like we’re on a

chessboard . . . And we just keep moving here and there.”

‘Dignity and respect’

Leaders of the food banks said they weren’t surprised that they were getting newcomers.

“We’re doing our best to get the message out there,” said Randi Shubin Dresner, president and CEO of Melville-based Island Harvest. “I think that there are many federal em-



Some of the fresh produce at the food distribution event.

ployees who have never looked for help before. It’s not an easy thing. We work with people who are struggling all the time. We treat them with dignity and respect. But a lot of people have never been through this process before. It’s scary” for many, she said.

Although the food banks were prepared to distribute food to up to 500 families, 139 people — 104 federal workers and an additional 35 who weren’t federal workers — registered at the distribution, according to a spokesman for Long Island Cares.

Shubin Dresner said social workers and a dietitian were on site Monday to provide even more resources to those who needed it.

Katherine Fritz, president and

CEO of Long Island Cares, based in Hauppauge, agreed that “dignity and respect” would be accorded recipients. “People are concerned about coming to a food pantry. And what does that mean? How are they going to be treated? There’s definitely a stigma to coming and asking for help . . . We want them to come here and let us know what they need, what their families need and we’re going to make sure they are served by both of our organizations,” she said.

Rep. Tom Suozzi (D-Glen Cove) appeared at the distribution event, praising the work of the food banks for helping people “in some of the most desperate circumstances in their lives.” He also criticized the suspension of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which has added to the food insecurity of many on Long Island.

The Trump administration said Monday it would partially fund SNAP after two federal judges ruled last week the administration was required to keep the food program running. The Associated Press reported.

Despite the political divisions, Suozzi said, “We just have to take care of people in difficult times, most of whom are children, senior citizens and disabled people.”