

'...BEFORE IT KILLS US'

How People's Action helped
stop health care repeal



**PEOPLE'S
ACTION**
INSTITUTE



Our story

For decades, People's Action has been a leader in organizing and advocacy around health care, both through our member organizations' state-based legislative work and through our nationally coordinated efforts to protect Medicaid and Medicare and advance health care for all. In our independent and coalition-based efforts alike, we have led the way in developing strategic and successful field plans, including in conservative districts, training and mobilizing allied organizations, and engaging the media to help shift the narrative.

This year was no exception. Immediately after the 2016 election, we began our campaign to protect health care, launching the effort with actions around the country on December 20, 2016. Though we were heading into a defensive fight, we knew we needed to consistently focus on our vision for a just health care system, one that embraces health care as a human right and as a public good.

We were joined in this fight by our partners at Health Care for America Now (HCAN) and the small business owners of the Main Street Alliance. Our program was a well-conceived, well-executed campaign that delayed the GOP drive to repeal, divided Republicans and made it impossible for Senate Majority Leader McConnell to line up the squares on his health repeal Rubik's cube.

United under the imperative, "Kill this bill before it kills us," our member groups mobilized tens of thousands of grassroots leaders in urban and rural areas who put their elected officials on speed dial, bird-dogged them at fundraisers, spoke up at town halls and devoted countless hours to defeating repeal.

Four strategies, in particular, were key to our movement's success in defeating the bill in the Senate after holding off a House vote for almost five months.

“ We were able to tap into the resistance to build our health care organizing to unprecedented levels of intensity and engagement. In addition, we were able to capture the energy of the resistance and focus it on building long term organizing capacity. In particular, we built a permanent Health Care for All Organizing Co-op which fully funds an organizer and has kept our top leaders and activists in the health care fight united and working towards long term structural reform of the health care system.”

Kevin Kane
Organizing Director
Citizen Action of Wisconsin



Rights and Democracy, a bi-state organization with membership in New Hampshire and Vermont, petitioned the newly elected Republican governors of both states to speak up against repeal through letter deliveries, dramatic local actions and call-in days. In New Hampshire, activists held a die-in in the statehouse when Gov. Chris Sununu hosted then-Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price. Ultimately, both Sununu and Gov. Philip B. Scott (R-Vermont) made public remarks opposing health care repeal.

1 Pressing governors

The Republican-led health repeal promised state governments little more than a huge fiscal mess. The attack on Medicaid heightened the stakes for governors of both parties – and made Republican governors, particularly in Medicaid expansion states, an important target in our fight.

Member organizations in Tennessee, Maryland, New Hampshire, Vermont and Ohio concentrated much of their work on pushing their Republican governors to make strong statements in opposition to repealing health care.

These Republican governors, in turn, placed significant pressure on key senators – a fact that was clear to the Trump administration, which tried to neutralize this pressure by offering Medicaid waivers in exchange for support for gutting Medicaid. That inducement was not enough to overcome public pressure.





As part of Maine People's Alliance's unrelenting program to ensure Sen. Susan Collins' rejection of the Republican health care repeal plan, leaders collected hundreds of stories and delivered them to Sen. Collins in prescription drug bottles, calling on her to say no to bad deals undermining our basic human right to health care.

Messages included heartbreaking stories of Mainers struggling to access high quality, affordable health care.

"I come here today having experienced both commercial healthcare insurance and now, Medicare and Mainecare, so I know both sides of this issue," said MPA leader Marie Pineo of South Portland. "I have experienced gaps in my Mainecare coverage which have caused me unnecessary medical bills that now show up on my credit report, all due to Maine's shrinking window of qualifications for the elderly and disabled and thanks to our home state's administrative abuse of Maine's poor and disadvantaged.

"The messages in these bottles, Senator Collins, are here to tell you that Maine cannot afford rollbacks or cuts to affordable healthcare because such things force Maine's most vulnerable citizens to make choices between food, rent, heat and other necessities like transportation, and their medications.

"...We need healthcare for all residents of Maine, and we are counting on you, Senator Collins."

2 Elevating Medicaid

From day one, we kept our attention on Medicaid. In partnership with HCAN, we organized waves of field actions across the country to highlight the many constituencies that count on Medicaid for their health care.

We gathered more than 1,000 Medicaid stories from our national online list and shared the stories with member organizations to use in their organizing and with members of Congress. We also highlighted Medicaid in a series of op-eds syndicated in small-town media outlets and in African-American media.

In the end, our focus on Medicaid wasn't only consistent with our values and vision, it was also a decisive factor in beating back the repeal effort. Medicaid represented a central concern of the Republican governors who spoke out against repeal, with Ohio Gov. John Kasich coming out strongly in support of his state's Medicaid expansion. It also became a sticking point for Sen. Susan Collins in Maine, Sen. Shelley Moore Capito in West Virginia, Sen. Rob Portman in Ohio, and other wavering Republican senators.



3 Making the rural case

Early in the fight, we recognized the disproportionate impact that repeal would have on people living in rural and smaller towns, and on rural and small town hospitals. We knew our campaign for health care

“People are terrified in Adair County that their health care is going to be taken away. They don’t want the rug pulled out from under them. Small, rural hospitals like ours don’t want to the rug pulled out from under them either.”

Barb Kalbach
Iowa Citizens for Community
Improvement leader

New Jersey, Michigan, and Minnesota shared their stories about how the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid helped them and their families, how repeal would affect them and how they planned to fight to kill the bill.

We also lifted up the effects on rural and small-town communities in op-eds syndicated in local and regional media.

was incomplete without the voices and perspectives of people living in less-populated areas.

We kicked off our rural and small-town organizing by bringing hometown health care stories directly to a town hall held in Washington, D.C. Moderated by Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), activists from member organizations in Iowa,



According to federal data, about 1.5 million Tennesseans, or 22 percent of the state, live in a rural area. Tennessee Citizen Action and its allies organized a “tractorcade” in downtown Nashville. The tractors were adorned with signage about the devastating impact of repeal on rural areas. After the tractorcade through the center of the city, they held a press conference about the effect of repeal in their communities.

4 Driving a wedge among Republicans

Alongside these strategies was an organizing effort that mobilized tens of thousands of people to attend rallies, town halls, district office drop-ins and other events. This organizing created the broad movement to block health care repeal that captured and sustained national attention, divided Republicans on the center-right from those on the far-right, held moderates accountable and turned the GOP's top legislative goal into a politically toxic bill they touched at their own risk.

Our laser-like focus on two key areas, Medicaid and pre-existing conditions, helped drive the wedge between Republicans even deeper by mobilizing powerful constituencies and players in critical moments who could speak to the massive negative impact that repeal would bring.

New Jersey Citizen Action (NJCA) and New Jersey Organizing Project identified several key persuadable Republican House votes and worked diligently to ensure that they opposed Affordable Care Act repeal. Together and separately, they held weekly candlelight vigils at their member of Congress's office, and organized direct actions and mobilizations in the streets, at their offices, and at town hall meetings to demonstrate massive public opposition to repeal.

After the collapse of the first scheduled House vote in March, Rep. Tom MacArthur (R-N.J.) sponsored an amendment intended to sway more moderate Republicans to support the bill. With the help of NJCA member and MacArthur constituent Barbara Blonsky, People's Action delivered to MacArthur more than 32,000 signatures in opposition to repeal. Many of the people signing the petition personally benefitted from the ACA.

"I was diagnosed with breast cancer more than 20 years ago. Because of the ACA, I have been able to get the care I need, even though I have a pre-existing condition. But the latest Republican health care repeal proposal would undo protections for people like me," Barbara said. The story was picked up by 23 news outlets nationwide.





By the numbers

- 797** actions/events held
- 155** national press clips
- 683** state-based press clips
- 240,479** people educated
- 220,593** grassroots contacts to members of Congress
- 2,474** stories collected
- 261** letters to the editor/op-eds submitted
- 142** meetings with elected officials

“People’s Action has been extremely helpful in our fight against health care repeal. They sent staff to assist on the ground at a critical point during midsummer’s flurry of actions, helped craft op-eds for super-quick turnarounds, and advised us on fast-moving events at the national level that affected our in-state strategies.”

Gary Zuckett
Executive Director,
West Virginia Citizen Action Group

Going forward

Republican leaders aren’t going away when it comes to cutting our health care – but neither are we. We’ll continue to defend health care from policy and budget attacks, all the while furthering our vision for health care for all. This includes continued defense in Congress of public health care programs and funding, advancing prescription drug reform, investing in state-based public expansion programs and improving Medicare. We hope you will continue to join us in this fight!



Thank you to the more than 20 People's Action member organizations who drove our collective efforts to defeat repeal, including:

Citizen Action of New York
 Citizen Action of Wisconsin
 Citizen Action/Illinois
 Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
 Jane Addams Senior Caucus (Illinois)
 Keystone Progress
 Living United for Change in Arizona (LUCHA)

Long Island Progressive Coalition
 Maine People's Alliance
 Michigan United
 New Citizen Citizen Action
 New Jersey Organizing Project
 Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition
 ONE Northside (Illinois)
 People Organized for Westside Renewal (POWER, California)
 ProgressOhio

Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada
 Progressive Maryland
 Rights and Democracy New Hampshire
 Rights and Democracy Vermont
 San Francisco Rising
 Take Action Minnesota
 Tennessee Citizen Action
 Unite Oregon
 United Vision for Idaho
 Virginia Organizing
 Washington Community Action Network

Help us keep up the fight

Your contribution will allow us to continue the movement toward health care as a human right for all.

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone number _____

Email address _____

I am making a ☐ monthly ☐ one-time gift of:

☐ \$20 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$_____

☐ I am enclosing a check payable to People's Action

☐ Please charge my

☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa ☐ American Express

Card number _____

Expiration date _____ CVN _____

Name on card _____