



**Statement to Health Policy Oversight Committee
from Patrick Coughlin, Bridges of Iowa Executive Director**

Dec. 2, 2019

As a community-based, long-term substance abuse and addiction treatment provider, Bridges of Iowa interacts with Iowa Medicaid in several key ways. Many of our clients come to Bridges as a result of legal entanglements, most notably arrests that land them in the Polk County Jail. The vast majority by this time do not have private insurance. If they were employed before their arrest, they most likely are not after. Our relationship with Medicaid and the managed care organizations (MCOs) – AmeriGroup and Iowa Total Care – provide the health coverage needed to start recovery. It is the seed investment that leads to meaningful change and long-term recovery and productivity.

The transition to privatized Medicaid has not been without bumps for Bridges. To be eligible for in-patient treatment, our clients not only need to be approved for Medicaid (or have their coverage reactivated), they must be assigned to an MCO, and receive a medical exemption. We have experienced serious issues as our clients navigated these three steps with the gap in coverage averaging more than 59 days. The result is that these clients had no Medicaid coverage for the most expensive part of the treatment process. The nearly two-month lag in Medicaid reimbursement meant that Bridges could help fewer people and the jail population continued to grow.

We are pleased to report that we have seen many positive improvements in the past six months, perhaps the most important being the implementation of “passive assignment.” The change brought immediate relief and reduced our average number of uncovered days from 59 to fewer than 20.

While the change means more people are getting the help they need in a more expeditious manner, the coverage gap continues to be an obstacle to delivering long-term addiction treatment to all who need it. We appreciate the great strides that have been made and look forward to continuing to work together to ensure that Iowans get the long-term treatment they need to overcome addiction.

Medicaid coverage plays an essential role in the path to recovery. At Bridges, we value this investment because it allows our clients to reclaim their lives and return to productivity. As they progress through the program, they get jobs, repair family relationships, establish new support networks and become healthy, productive Iowans. Nearly all of our clients in our long-term program transition from Medicaid to private insurance before they graduate.

Again, thank you.

Patrick Coughlin