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POLITICS

Evers signs into law postpartum Medicaid coverage for low-income women



Jessie Opoien

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MADISON – Postpartum Medicaid coverage for thousands of low-income women in Wisconsin will extend from 60 days to a full year with Gov. Tony Evers' signature of a law years in the making.

Evers, who has [included the extension](#) of postpartum Medicaid coverage in all four of his proposed budgets since taking office in 2019, signed the measure into law March 18 at Children's Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

“Expanding postpartum coverage is the right move for Wisconsin families, it’s the right move for our state, and it’s a privilege to be able to sign this bill into law today,” Evers said in a statement. “It’s been a long time coming, but I’m darn proud we got it done.”

Wisconsin is the [second-to-last state](#) in the nation to extend this coverage, leaving only Arkansas without it.

Enacting this policy was an uphill battle over the last seven years despite its widespread bipartisan support. The bill was first introduced with only Democratic support in 2019, and grew into a bipartisan effort in the years since, with Sen. Jesse James, R-Altoona, and Rep. Patrick Snyder, R-Weston, introducing it in the current legislative session.

"This journey, since its inception, has been nothing short of a wild ride. There have been endless conversations to keep this bill alive, and it has finally paid off," James and Snyder said in a joint statement after the bill passed the Assembly last month.

"One thing we have done this session consistently is never give up. We told people both in the Capitol and back at home that our faith will not die until the last gavel has fallen."

The bill appeared doomed to fail as recently a month ago as it faced steep opposition from Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, who consistently said he does not support expanding welfare programs, and a small group of other Republicans.

Ultimately, the measure [passed the Republican-led Assembly with a 95-1 vote](#) on Feb. 18 and the GOP-led [Senate with a 32-1 vote](#) last spring. Rep. Shae Sortwell, R-Two Rivers, and Sen. Chris Kapenga, R-Delafield, were the only lawmakers to vote against it.

"It was messy getting here, but God am I glad we're here, because no mom and no baby should have to go without health care after a mother has just given birth. A mom should be at her best to care for her child," said Rep. Lisa Subeck, D-Madison, who has been a cosponsor since the bill was first introduced, ahead of the Assembly vote last month.

For months after giving birth, women are still at risk for a range of life-threatening, post-pregnancy complications, including heart conditions, clotting disorders, postpartum depression and more. State health officials have noted the policy can help reduce pregnancy-related deaths and lower infant mortality rates by increasing access to preventive care, mental health services and substance abuse treatment.

Before the enactment of the new law, pregnant women whose income is up to 306% of the poverty level were eligible for BadgerCare Plus, the state's largest Medicaid program.

The state Department of Health Services has projected an additional 5,020 women will qualify for coverage under the extension, with an average cost of \$307 per covered woman per month, or \$7.3 million in state dollars per year.

Statewide, a third of the 63 pregnancy-related deaths in the three years from 2020 to 2022 occurred more than two months after giving birth, said Arielle Exner, legislative director at the state's Department of Health Services, during a hearing on the bill last year.

In addition, women with high blood pressure or other conditions who lose health coverage midway through the postpartum period could see their conditions worsen to the point they become chronic or threaten their long-term health, supporters said during the 2025 hearing.

"Supporting new moms and their babies in the first year of life is critical for the long-term physical and mental health for both, and we are grateful to Gov. Evers for his many years advocating for policies to improve infant and maternal health and signing (this law)," DHS Secretary Kirsten Johnson said in a statement. "Research shows extending this coverage improves health outcomes by strengthening a new mother's physical and emotional health and reduces the need for extensive and expensive long-term treatment."

In the last few years, most states without a yearlong coverage period for postpartum women have approved it, making it part of their Medicaid programs.

The legislation had the backing of a broad coalition of health care advocates, along with groups supporting and opposing abortion access.

Among those advocating for its passage were a group of Wisconsinites with views across the political spectrum who [met in 2024](#) seeking areas of agreement following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Five participants from the conversation led by Builders Movement attended the March 18 bill signing, including Ali Muldrow, a progressive activist from Madison.

Jake VandenPlas, a conservative libertarian from Sturgeon Bay, another participant who advocated in favor of the bill, said seeing the bill become law is "an indication that our legislators are actually listening to us."

The experience gave Muldrow "a renewed sense of faith in what we can accomplish when people come together and stick together."

"It shouldn't have taken this long to pass legislation that saves women's lives, but I am glad we could find common ground for the common good so we can move Wisconsin forward, together," said Rep. Robyn Vining, D-Wauwatosa, in a statement.

A 2025 Marquette University Law School poll found that [two-thirds of Wisconsinites](#) supported expanding postpartum Medicaid coverage, including 92% of Democrats, 75% of independents and 39% of Republicans.

Jessie Opoien can be reached at jessie.opoien@jrn.com.

(This story was updated to add new information.)