

## Wisconsin seniors face extraordinary risks amid pandemic

Written by WisDems Press, Philip Shulman

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WISCONSIN - Despite the acute risk that coronavirus poses to seniors, President Trump has put them in harm's way with his disastrous response and repeated attempts to repeal the ACA. After spending years gutting the health care system, Republican lawmakers are backing Trump's efforts to put partisan games above human lives.

The Wisconsin Alliance of the Association of Retired Americans Gary Mitchell penned an op-ed standing up for the elderly Wisconsinites Trump has put in his crosshairs.

[\*\*Read the full story here or below.\*\*](#)

Wisconsin Examiner: Gary Mitchell: Wisconsin seniors face extraordinary risks amid pandemic

As the COVID19 pandemic rages in America, our senior citizens face extraordinary risks. I know, because I'm one of them. As a lung transplant survivor requiring immunosuppressing drugs, I fall squarely into the highest risk categories.

To date, about 80% of coronavirus deaths in America have been seniors over the age of 65. But in spite of that fact, President Donald Trump and his Republican allies continue to undermine access to healthcare through sabotage of the Affordable Care Act. And it's our seniors with the most to lose.

Trump and Republicans in Congress have spent years systematically sabotaging seniors' healthcare. Between undermining Medicaid expansion, proposing steep Medicare budget cuts and prescription drug price increases, and the repeated and ongoing attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act, they have done nothing but cause older Americans to lose coverage and face higher costs for care. At a time when millions of insured people are facing the possibility of coronavirus infection and devastating healthcare bills, the need for critical healthcare programs like Medicare and Medicaid has never been more important.

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Specifically, nearly 40 million people across the country have already lost their jobs, and an estimated 27 million have lost their employer-sponsored health coverage as a result of the crisis. Economists have estimated that up to 43 million people could lose their job-based coverage during the pandemic. Outrageously, Trump and the Republicans backing him have eroded America's healthcare safety net, which will undoubtedly devastate families and hamper efforts to curb the spread of this deadly disease.

To make matters worse, seniors are at high risk of developing serious complications if they contract COVID19. Roughly half of people who had died from coronavirus in Wisconsin were 70 or older as of mid-May. Despite the dire warnings from experts, Trump and Republican lawmakers in Wisconsin are prioritizing reopening the economy even if it means sacrificing the health and safety of our nation's most vulnerable people.

The fact is that as older adults, we face unique risks as the country grapples with this healthcare crisis. We know from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that the groups "at high-risk for severe illness from COVID19" are people 65 years old and older, and those who live in nursing homes and long-term care facilities. Ahead of the pandemic, the Trump administration weakened the federal government's oversight of nursing homes and rolled back critical protections for residents. Now, nursing homes and long-term care facilities across the country have experienced a surge in outbreaks, with about one-third of deaths in America associated with these facilities. As of May 26, 41% of Wisconsin coronavirus deaths had occurred in long-term care facilities, and now more than 50 Wisconsin nursing homes are under investigation for coronavirus outbreaks.

The novel coronavirus is also a threat to millions of seniors and older adults who live outside of institutions and may be exposed through work, family members or caregivers. Roughly 47 million older adults in this country are aging in place. More than seven million seniors are considered medically frail, 60% have at least two chronic conditions, such as heart disease or diabetes, which are serious factors for developing complications from COVID-19. And we know that nearly 32 million people ages 55-64 have pre-existing conditions. The current rush to reopen prematurely puts older workers at risk before their workplaces are safe again.

While the Trump Administration continues their war on seniors' health care, Democrats in Congress are taking concrete action to lower costs and help them during this crisis, including passage of a bill to lower prescription drug prices by empowering Medicare to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for lower drug costs. They have also proposed strengthening the Affordable Care Act through a special enrollment period during the pandemic and to provide incentives to states which have yet to do so to expand Medicaid. America's seniors — and all who love them — desperately need President Trump and Republicans to end their assault on America's health care.

Now.