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Mandatory Volunteerism

Mandatory volunteerism is a mandate on an individual to volunteer, sometimes called “community engagement” or “community service,” with a nonprofit for a specific number of hours per week in order to be eligible for certain government-provided benefits. Legislation has been introduced at the state level over the past few years that would impose a “volunteerism” requirement for individuals before they could receive such existing benefits as unemployment insurance, Medicaid services, SNAP (food stamps) assistance, and welfare benefits.

Why It Matters

Mandatory volunteerism is harmful because the policy imposes increased costs, burdens, and liabilities on nonprofits by an influx of coerced individuals. Few if any of the mandatory volunteerism bill sponsors ever ask whether nonprofits in their communities can handle an onslaught of hundreds or thousands of individuals showing up on nonprofit doorsteps for the purpose of *doing time* rather than *doing good*.

Where We Stand

"The Council of Nonprofits supports programs that promote volunteering activities that mutually benefit individuals and the people served through nonprofits, but

opposes proposals to condition receipt of government-provided benefits on requirements that individuals volunteer at nonprofit organizations, a policy known as 'mandatory volunteerism,' that impose increased costs, burdens, and liabilities on nonprofits by an influx of coerced individuals."

- [Public Policy Agenda](#)

Status

In 2018, the Trump Administration issued guidance in January 2018 expressing a willingness to allow states to [impose work and volunteering requirements](#) as a condition of eligibility for state Medicaid programs. President Trump signed an [Executive Order](#) in April 2018 directing federal agencies to enforce or add work requirements for public assistance programs such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps.

Prior to and following the guidance and Executive Order, state legislators introduced bills that would impose or include mandatory volunteerism in lieu of the work requirement. [Kentucky](#) was the first state to receive federal approval of its proposal to implement a work requirement as a condition of Medicaid eligibility. An additional [20 states considered or sought approval](#) for work requirements under Medicaid waivers.

President Biden subsequently withdrew the approved work requirement waivers in 2021, concluding that these provisions do not promote the objectives of the Medicaid program. Few states implemented the policy due to litigation and withdraws.

More About Mandatory Volunteerism

- [Don't Take Away the Commitment to Giving Back](#), David L. Thompson, National Council of Nonprofits blog, Feb. 5, 2018.
- [Medicaid Work Requirements Challenged in Court](#), *Nonprofit Advocacy Matters*, Feb.5, 2018.
- [States Consider Medicaid Work Requirement](#), *Nonprofit Advocacy Matters*, Jan.22, 2018.

Additional Resources

- [An Overview of Medicaid Work Requirements: What Happened Under the Trump and Biden Administrations?](#), Kaiser Family Foundation, May 3, 2022.
- [Work Requirements May Be Just the Beginning of Medicaid Changes Under Trump](#), *Governing*, Jan. 11, 2018.