



# Comparison of Public Benefit Changes Proposed by the Governor and Adopted in the Legislature's Coronavirus Response Bill

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To help ease the disastrous health and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Evers proposed legislation to make wide-ranging changes in the state's public assistance programs, including budget increases and policy measures. [You can find our summary of his proposals here.](#)

An alternative bill developed by Republican leaders and passed in both houses of the Legislature is far narrower. Although it contains some of the important policy changes recommended by the Governor, including a couple of actions that enable the state to qualify for and spend large increases in federal funding recently approved by Congress, the majority party's bill does not explicitly make a single appropriation of funds. As a result, the bill that was passed is much more limited in scope, and the absence of any appropriations made it a bill that the Governor could not item-veto.

This issue brief compares the portions of the Governor's proposals and the Legislature's bill relating to public assistance programs, including child care, Medicaid, nutrition, Unemployment Insurance, and support funded through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

Topic	Governor's Proposals	Legislature's Bill
<b>Subsidized Child Care</b>		
Expand Wisconsin Shares eligibility	Authorize the Dept. of Children and Families (DCF) to expand the WI Shares child care subsidy program to include people who need it because of the pandemic, such as essential workers.	Not included, but see the next item
Subsidized child care for essential workers	Provides \$25 million to help health care providers and essential workers hire child care providers, and also for the following two items (below).	Expands the Medicaid child care benefit to allow subsidies for kids under age 12 whose parents are direct care or medical workers.

Hazard pay for certain child care providers	Authorize hazard pay for child care providers who are risking their health and businesses by serving essential workers at high risk of exposure to the virus.	Not included
Payments to providers forced to close	Use part of the \$25 million to make supplemental payments to providers forced to close by the pandemic.	Not included
Use of the increased federal \$s from the child care block grant.	Not specified -- which would appear to give DCF latitude (within federal guidelines) regarding how to use the new \$51.3 million.	Allocates the increased funds to 2 appropriations from which any spending is subject to Finance Committee review and approval.
<b>TANF-funded Public Assistance (using \$100 million from the state's TANF reserves)</b>		
Expand Wisconsin Works (W-2) eligibility	Expand W-2 to include parents unable to work because of the pandemic.	Not included
Increase the Job Access Loan Program	Allow DCF to increase funds for the program, which provides loans of up to \$1,600 to meet emergency needs that support employment.	Not included
Short-term financial assistance	For individuals not receiving W-2 benefits, authorize DCF to provide short-term cash payments for essential needs during the public health emergency.	Not included
Expand emergency assistance	Authorize DCF to make payments of up to \$1,200 to assist with housing costs for those adversely affected by the emergency.	Not included
<b>Nutrition Assistance</b>		
Funding for food banks	Appropriate \$10 million to support emergency food bank operations.	Not included
Meal delivery programs	Provides \$10 million for meal delivery programs, including new partnerships between restaurants & the public sector.	Not included
<b>Health Care – Medicaid, BadgerCare and SeniorCare</b>		
Qualifying for the Medicaid increase approved by Congress	To capture about \$50 million per month, temporarily suspend two recent BadgerCare changes for childless adults, including newly imposed premiums.	Included

Allow DHS to seek federal approval for Medicaid changes	Enable DHS to apply for wide-ranging changes to help make Medicaid a more flexible tool to use against the pandemic. For example, suspend prior authorization requirements and reduce barriers to hiring qualified health providers.	Allows DHS to seek federal approval for a long list of changes, but omits some of the ones proposed by the Governor, such as the suspension of cost-sharing.
Funding increase for Medicaid providers	Provides \$274 million increase (including \$94 million GPR) for Medicaid providers by boosting reimbursement rates and making supplemental payments.	Not included
Strengthening SeniorCare	Amends the SeniorCare prescription drug program by covering the costs of any vaccines developed for COVID-19.	Included
Assistance in signing up for public or private insurance	To help people sign up for Medicaid or private coverage, provide \$1.1 million for insurance navigators.	No provision
<b>Strengthening Unemployment Insurance (UI)</b>		
Remove one-week waiting period	Repeal the one-week waiting period requirement for receipt of UI benefits.	Suspend the one-week wait during the period 3/12/20 to 2/9/21.
Funding the pandemic-related claims	Create a “sum-sufficient” (uncapped) appropriation to reimburse the UI trust fund for all benefits related to the public health emergency (PHE).	The costs for benefits related to the PHE would be charged to either the balancing account of the UI trust fund or DWD's interest and penalties account.
Benefits for workers whose hours are reduced	During the Public Health Emergency (PHE) expand the Work Share program, which allows partial UI benefits for workers whose hours are reduced.	Included
Authorize UI payments to laid-off workers receiving partial pay	Allow people who have been laid off, but are still receiving partial pay from an employer, to be eligible for UI benefits.	Not included
<b>Worker's Compensation</b>		
Expand Worker's Compensation eligibility	Allow critical workers to claim Worker's Compensation benefits related to COVID-19	Included, but only for police and first responders who have been in direct contact with someone who tested positive for the virus.

Heating Assistance		
Extending the application deadline	Extends the current May 15 deadline until the end of the year.	Included

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic is having disastrous consequences for many people in Wisconsin, especially those with low incomes, people of color, and front-line workers. The three federal bills approved by Congress provide some relief, but have not gone far enough. By supplementing the new federal dollars with state funds, as well as \$100 million from the balance in Wisconsin’s TANF block grant, the legislation proposed by the Governor would have helped fill in some of the significant gaps in the federal response.

The bill passed by the Legislature contains changes recommended by the Governor that will enable Wisconsin to capture significant increases in federal funding for Medicaid and Unemployment Insurance benefits. However, the final legislation ([Act 185](#)) falls far short of the type of bold, decisive action that is needed to save lives and mitigate the harm to families, workers, and our state.

This crisis is bringing into stark focus the substantial and shameful inequities that existed before COVID-19, and it is compounding those disparities in communities of color. In the weeks and months ahead, state policymakers need to closely monitor the impacts of the pandemic and develop bold solutions that enable our state to come out the other side of this crisis, transformed into a place that works for all of us.