



THE KEYSTONE

A BIENNIAL NEWSLETTER
PUT PEOPLE FIRST! PENNSYLVANIA
WINTER/SPRING 2024

“There are millions of poor people in this country who have very little, or even nothing, to lose. If they can be helped to take action together, they will do so with a freedom and a power that will be a new and unsettling force in our complacent national life...”

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

**TELLING OUR STORIES
TO BUILD A
NEW AND UNSETTLING FORCE
IN PENNSYLVANIA TODAY**





WHO ARE WE?

Put People First! PA gives voice to everyday people who are struggling to meet our basic needs. We define our basic needs as things we need to live healthy and fulfilling lives—things like education, housing, health care, jobs with living wages, food, and a healthy environment.

We're a membership organization made up mostly of people who know from our life experience that poor and working people need to unite and have a voice. We're building, county by county, all across Pennsylvania. We're urban and rural. We're multiracial. We're politically independent. Until we unite, we don't have the power to change things.

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We are publishing Put People First! PA's bi-annual newsletter, *The Keystone*, in the season of the longest night of the year; cold, isolating and bitter. Some of us are unhoused, others sick and many have died. We memorialize those we have lost, welcome the newborn, and tell our stories of struggle in this time of the war economy creating many crises for the poor and dispossessed.

We share highlights of our organizing drive to fight the Medicaid Cut-offs, and updates on our campaign for the restoration of the full adult dental benefit to Medicaid. We share poetry, videos and member reflections from our National Nonviolent Medicaid Army's Arts & Culture nights or following our actions & events.

We hope our stories show you why we must unite and organize ourselves to overcome division and transform society. We invite you to become involved in this struggle!

Members of the Put People First! PA Media & Communications Team

How many of your teeth are in this pile?

If we counted up all the lost teeth in PA because we couldn't get the care we needed it would be in the millions.

This is a direct result of the cut to the adult dental benefit in Medicaid that has been in place since 2011.

Put People First! PA has been pressuring our legislators for more than five years to restore the adult dental benefit in Medicaid. A bill to do this passed the House and a companion bill has been introduced in the Senate. The Department of Human Services has committed to funding the dental benefit in 2024.

We know the people in power aren't just going to "do the right thing".

#WeNeedOurTeeth #Medicaid4All

[Share your story](#)

#MedicaidMondays



Illustration by **Anita**, SEPA HRC

Join the fight to save our teeth!

Campaign Update

5 Years Fighting: Restore the Adult Dental Benefit THIS YEAR!

Background: In 2011, Governor Tom Corbett, under guidance from the Obama administration, cut the benefit from Medicaid to make up for budget shortfalls. Since 2018, Put People First! PA (PPF-PA) has included the restoration of the Adult Dental Benefit (ADB) in our yearly campaign plans as a key demand of the powerholders.

Fighting back: In March 2021 we held a call in day to pressure our legislators to ask about restoring the adult dental benefit in budget hearings. One of the people we called was Jay Costa, who ended up asking the question during hearings with the Department of Human Services (DHS). Then we held another call-in demanding that DHS restore the benefit.

In September of 2023, PPF-PA took action during the Nonviolent Medicaid Army Week of Action, first regionally then statewide. On September 20th, regions caravanned to the Capitol, to join together our #MedicaidMondays quilt and make demands of the powerholders inside.

We met with DHS Secretary Val Arkoosh with demands of: ending the Medicaid cuts; expansion of Medicaid to all PA residents; extension of time to file an appeal from 30 to 60 days; release of information on both the numbers of appeal submission & approvals; and a restoration of the Adult Dental Benefit in Medicaid. Sec. Arkoosh verbally committed to making the restoration a priority of her budget submitted to the Governor Josh Shapiro.

Where we're at now: Since our Week of Action, there has been movement in the

state legislature around the ADB. In December 2023, House Bill 1417 which would restore dental coverage in Medicaid passed! Jay Costa is the prime sponsor of companion bill 955 in the Senate. The bill is currently in Senate Health & Human Services Committee, and we are exercising our political independence to ensure we are our holding of both parties accountable to make sure the Adult Dental Benefit is restored.

We are also putting pressure on Gov. Shapiro to include funding for the Adult Dental Benefit in his 2024 budget, through:

- Members sending personal letters about the importance of the adult dental benefit to our lives to Governor Shapiro,
- Organizations signing on to show their support,
- A ramped up #MedicaidMondays social media campaign demanding #WeNeedOurTeeth and more!

- Anita 
Campaign & Legislative Team



BLOG LINKS

[Read our Members
Dental Stories here](#)



Campaign Update

Members Dental Stories

During the pandemic, I couldn't get regular dental treatment; if I had, the cavities I had could have been filled... My dentist & I decided to have the remaining teeth pulled & get dentures. I have multiple illnesses that caused my teeth to weaken. Now, at the age of 54, I have no teeth and that has contributed to my digestive problems. I need a full set of teeth which I cannot now get. Besides the pain & dysfunction of not having teeth, I'm caught in the red tape of rules that were not adapted to Covid and now I'm paying the price. Both Katsur Dental and PA Health & Wellness failed me. I need my dentures!

Rica – Irwin, PA

[More](#)
[#MedicaidMondays](#)
[here!](#)



I am now 45 years old, missing 6 teeth and have two additional broken ones....

After I was cut off of Medicaid in 2018 for making a little bit too much money, I discovered that the free dental clinics near me had waiting lists so long they stopped adding names. I tried ... pay for a cheap dental plan on Pennie. I've paid for it for over two years now and have yet to find a dentist who will take it. Most recently, I was told by the Aspen Dental nearest me (40 mins away) that they are only allowed to have 280 patients with a government subsidized plan and they couldn't treat me because they were at their limit.

Jess – Lake Ariel, PA

.....I have to pay out of pocket. I had to pay, without any assistance, for two tooth extractions and three root canals that failed. Then for a partial denture. Then for a full extraction of my upper teeth. Then the process of getting full dentures. All of this could've been avoided had I been able to find a dentist who took my insurance after my dentist retired, instead of going several years without seeing one. I am 25, have a full set of upper dentures, and have had to pay several thousands of dollars. Do better.

Cassidy – Dallas, PA

Basebuilding ✨ Medicaid Cut-offs Organizing Drive

The summer marked the high activity time in our Medicaid Cut-offs Organizing Drive. Across the state, Put People First! PA held 7 People's Clinics, where we offered healthcare screenings, benefits sign-ups, and supported people across the state to file 15 Medicaid applications. We also held 12 door-knocking drives, where we went into our neighborhoods and knocked on doors to alert people of the Medicaid Cut-offs and invite them to join the fight against the cuts. We did People's Clinics and door knockings in Westmoreland County, the Oakhurst community in Johnstown, the Evergreen Manors community in Altoona, Plymouth, Berwick, Feasterville-Trevose, Upper Darby, and Jenkintown, PA.

We hosted and participated in organizing exchanges across regions of our state as well as nationally. Put People First! PA members participated in two national organizing exchanges with the Nonviolent Medicaid Army in Wyoming and Georgia. Northeast PA hosted Southeast PA members in Berwick in August. Every Healthcare Rights Committee was out base-building at least once a month - often more - the entire summer.



"By the end of the summer, people started to know and recognize us. If you continue showing up trying to do good, eventually somebody's going to listen. That's what we mean when we say "political center of gravity". We'll be a political center of gravity when our communities are looking to us, when our powerholders recognize us, and we are able to absorb all of the poor and dispossessed.

As our lives get harder - inflation, the rich getting richer while we get poorer - people look towards something and we hope that we've made a relationship with people so that when they look towards something, it's towards us."

- Ron

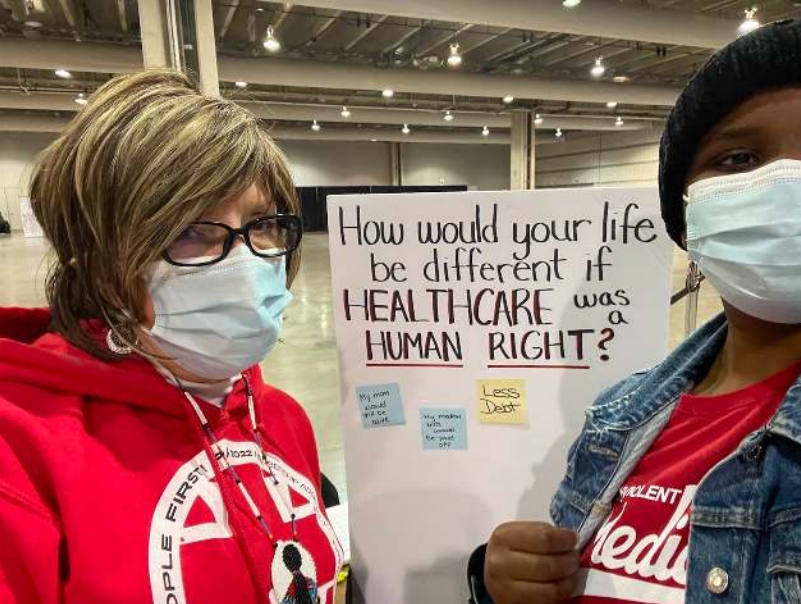
Central-Appalachia Healthcare Rights Committee Co-Coordinator



[Read more about basebuilding here!](#)



On the left corner SEPA and NEPA Healthcare Rights Committees (HRCs) held an organizing exchange in Berwick, PA. Above left CAPA HRC holding a Peoples Clinic, and to right, SCPA Tabling



Through no fault of my own, I was born in the USA in this age of existence. I feel like the government that I was born into feels the need to punish me. Growing up I felt like an outcast, that I did not fit in due to disability. I was lucky enough to be in a stable home, with the legally acceptable level of various traumas.

Moving out, I lost all that, any community and supports, and fell head long into grinding poverty. I was frequently evicted, unable to keep a job, injured many times before I got on food stamps and public welfare insurance. In that time, I spent years in pain due to limited options in healthcare, including being hung up on when seeking dental care. The poorly healed joint sprains from over a decade ago still give me issues with movement.

It took me twenty years to finally find people who are willing to have the tough conversations. Fight for a better future for all people no matter who they are, that's why I joined PPF-PA and the Nonviolent Medicaid Army.

They recognized that we need to come together to organize, share ideas to better communities. As they say, no one knows everything, but all of us know something. I take that saying to heart and say it as often as I can. Our differences can be our strengths, and with PPF-PA I feel like social change is an achievable goal. I only hope more people discover the community that sees and values all people. I also hope I'm there to be that help for those people. No one is ok, and we all need to heal together through action.

Nicole R

Member, Northeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee

September 17 - 23, 2023

Nonviolent Medicaid Army Week of Action



In September 2023 Put People First! PA held five local and one statewide action as part of the National Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) Week of Action. These actions centered on connecting across difference, sharing stories from people all across the country, in both "blue" and "red" states who are impacted by the bipartisan decision to cut **24 million people** or more off of Medicaid as pandemic protections came to an end.

Through the Week of Action the NVMA aimed to hold both parties accountable for taking away healthcare from millions of people across the country and for the life threatening conditions these actions are already causing. We called out those making money off of our sickness and death, and we continue to amplify our common struggle for healthcare as a human right as we build our movement nationwide.

Check out the videos to learn more about Healthcare Rights Committee actions in Johnstown, Pittsburgh, Delaware County, Lancaster County, Berwick and Harrisburg.

[Watch more videos here.](#)

Content is no longer available



[Nonviolent Medicaid Army Week of Action](#)



[Let us March out as the Poor](#)



NVMA Week of Action

Commitments from Secretary Arkoosh

On Wednesday September 20th Put People First! PA members gathered in the East Wing Rotunda of the Capitol Building to demand an end to the Medicaid cut-offs, unveil our Medicaid stories quilt, and deliver our petition to the Governor and Secretary the Department of Human Services, Val Arkoosh. In our meeting, the Secretary made these commitments.



FOX56.COM

Columbia County citizens protest against hospital closures and Medicaid cuts: 'A life-or-death matter'



DELCOTIMES.COM

Group protests Pa. Medicaid cutoffs in Delaware County, holds rally in Harrisburg

- ★ Add the **FULL ADULT DENTAL BENEFIT** back into Medicaid as one of their budget priorities when the department submits their budget to the Governor in 2024
- ★ Add language about the **RIGHT TO AN APPEAL** for everyone who gets cut from Medicaid
- ★ Publish appeal **approval/denial** rates in their online tracker
- ★ Look into **RAISING "ELIGIBILITY" LIMITS** for Medicaid
- ★ Look into **EXTENDING THE LENGTH OF TIME** to file an appeal and keep your healthcare to 60 days

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: New data indicates 99% of all Medicaid redetermination appeals denied by DHS

PENNSYLVANIA - Multiple Pennsylvania residents have reached out to Put People First! PA indicating they or their family are facing danger from Medicaid cutoffs that threaten their safety and wellbeing.



[Read full media advisory here.](#)

This year Put People First! PA supported seven people across the state to file appeals and held two public actions at the appeals hearings. PPF-PA doesn't engage medicaid cut off appeals like a social service provider. Doing an appeal with us means sharing your healthcare story, connecting with your legislator, getting connected with a Healthcare Rights Committee in an ongoing way and joining this organizing drive to help others fight back. Check out coverage from appeals in Southwest PA (SWPA) and Southeast PA (SEPA).

PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

JUNE: For Gary Rush, of Dormont, the first hurdle was a letter he said he received stating he was going to lose his coverage.

"I must of gotten a letter on a Saturday. I didn't open it up until Monday night. It said I was going to lose my health coverage on April 20, which was only a few days away," Mr. Rush, 67, said. [...]

Encouraged by his mother to reach out to Put People First! PA, Mr. Rush connected with the grassroots organization for assistance with filing an appeal.

With that all-volunteer group's help, "In one day we were able to file the appeal. I wasn't sure what I would do for health coverage," Mr. Rush said.



DECEMBER: Members of the SEPA Healthcare Rights Committee showed up to appeal the unfair cut from Medicaid that Elsa faced! Elsa is the daughter of one of our members, Shari, and is one of the 1.2 million in PA and 24 million facing cut-offs! The welfare office tried to confuse and begged us not to continue with the appeal, which is the right of everyone in Pennsylvania. The judge was blown away that Elsa had folks with her; most people go up against the state on their own and get screwed over! But we're fighting back together because [#HealthcareIsAHumanRight](#).



POST-GAZETTE.COM

The Medicaid unwinding: Some 31% of renewals processed so far have resulted in lost coverage



To left: SEPA HRC Showing up for Medicaid Appeals hearing for member Elsa.

Above: Coverage SWPA HRC received after taking action against Gary losing his Medicaid.

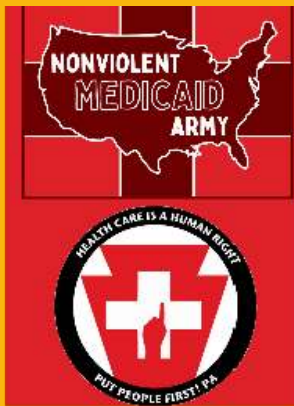
LINKS



[Watch interview with Elsa here.](#)



[Read news coverage here.](#)



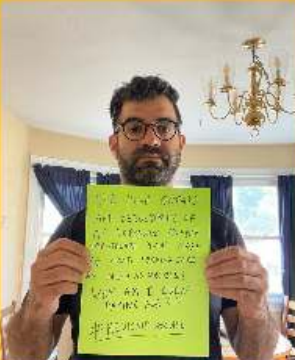
"I'm fortunate enough to be pretty healthy, but when I get sick I wait and hope it passes because I'm worried about out of pocket costs and my high deductible."
- Jamie, Delaware County



"The thing that upsets me is so many people like me are losing a battle that they don't know they can fight back against poverty and cuts to Medicaid."
- Shawn, Lancaster



"Medicaid is important to me because without it I can't afford to go to the doctor at all. I'm about to lose my Medicaid through no fault of my own and I'm in the middle of getting treatment for multiple health issues. No one deserves this!"
- Raphaela, Norristown



"Many people in my family get healthcare through Medicaid and they wouldn't be alive today without it. That's why I say Medicaid cuts = death."
- Nijmie, Central-Appalachia



"My son died because he couldn't get his medication. If they cut Medicaid people are going to die!"
- Jeanette, Philly



"My wife and I lost our apartment in a fire, so they sent me a Medicaid renewal letter to my Mom's address but I got it too late. So now they are telling me have to go into the welfare office, but they recently moved the office in my district so I need to find the address. You should be able to just call on the phone and do it."
- Bill, Philly



"It is time to organize the class to fight back. Only a social movement of the poor will bring an end to this diabolical death dealing system!"
- Matt, Lancaster



"My children and myself are Medicaid recipients. I'm worried myself and my children will lose our coverage. My children have asthma and need to be able to get their medication and be able to see the doctor"
- Joanie, Lancaster County



"Gov. Josh Shapiro and the Legislature must search their conscience and do the right thing: Expand Medicaid to include everyone and have mercy on staffs at county assistance offices who are tasked with cutting people's benefits."
- Alex Lotorto



"Too much greed in the world, too much hate, too much of us against one another. Love one another, help one another out, no matter what color you are, no matter who you are, what race. If you ever see a homeless person on the street, give them a couple dollars. They can't help that they don't have any place to go - the rent is so high, what do you expect with the government being so greedy, so we just gotta pull together."
- Lucy Fisher 1955-2023



"The lapse in my Medicaid because I moved has set me back in my health goals. I shouldn't have to wait for healthcare or prove I deserve it!"
- Harrison, Central Appalachia



"I, like millions of other Type 1 diabetics, struggle to afford our life-sustaining medications. If my gov't expects me to work, my gov't should expect me to be healthy. I will not be able to afford private insurance and my meds."
- Josh





"This is a direct attack on the poor and dispossessed. This shows that the ruling class doesn't care if we live or die."
- Matt, Lancaster



"Without Medicaid I wouldn't have been able to afford gender affirming surgery! No Pride in Wall Street-owned healthcare." - Andy, Norwich



"I work in public schools in Philadelphia, the poorest large city in the country, and many of our students and families rely on Medicaid to stay alive and to come to school and learn."



"My dream began with the desire to help others as a Registered Nurse. I have now walked away from that dream because the healthcare system is more concerned with money instead of people."
- Monica, South Central



**We deserve healthcare and food.
We shouldn't have to choose between
Medicaid and food stamps."
- Alexis, Central-Appalachia**



"Without Medicaid I couldn't afford prescriptions and doctor visits. I need it for dental. To see specialists. God forbid if necessary for an extended hospital stay; I wouldn't be able to afford any of it without Medicaid."

- Bill, Philly



"One of us is on life sustaining meds that will be \$3,000 monthly if cut off Medicaid. I have many back issues that I have to continuously be seen for. I have 3 young children and trying to show them a better me but it's hard." - Kandice, Northeast



"My daughter lost her BadgerCare. I was only able to get it for her because of changes in the rules during the pandemic. She had it 1 year. That was the only time in her life she ever had insurance and she's 13." - Trista Wisconsin



I had Medicaid until May, and it was wonderful and covered everything, even my \$30k/month drug listurisa. I was legally deemed disabled and transferred to Medicare, and I am facing Medicare refusing to cover TWO of my necessary drugs. It makes no sense! Covered under Medicaid but not covered on Medicare once disabled?! Maddening!

-Natalie, Butler County



"I work with patients in a reproductive health care clinic. I see patients struggling to scrape together funds for the care we provide, if patients do not seek care, they can soon find themselves with worsening quality of life, infertility, and death and disability." - Philly



"I'm so grateful to have Medicaid. I'm honestly worried about being in my thirties, because my sister died in hers. I'm worried because I grew up on poisoned land and drinking poisoned water. I know there's PFOAS & PFAS in my body and my blood - I'm at a higher risk of developing cancers and other health problems." Jacob, Montco



Poor people have the most to lose while private insurance companies will have the most to gain. Poor peoples' lives and dignity are far more important than the profit margins of healthcare profiteers! - Ana, Central Appalachia





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- Jen, Philly



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- Natalie, Butler County



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Poor people have the most to lose while private insurance companies will have the most to gain. Poor peoples' lives and dignity are far more important than the profit margins of healthcare profiteers! - Ana, Central Appalachia





"Without it I wouldn't be able to get the medications that have saved my life, and the healthcare that I need to stay healthy, well and alive." - Jen, Philly



"We shouldn't have to sacrifice all our funds that we work hard for, just to simply survive in this system. We shouldn't be paying it out to healthcare profiteers who just profit off our pain and suffering." - Vinnie, Lancaster



"Medicaid matters to me because without it I wouldn't be able to afford my prescription medications nor see my specialist doctors for my chronic pain. That's why I'm glad to be a member of Put People First! PA in the fight for healthcare as a human right." - Tammy, Lancaster



"How would your life be different if healthcare was treated as a human right?" - Ron, Appalachia



"Medicaid has no color. I'm a veteran so I will keep my Medicaid, but I have family who will be hurt by these cuts." - Sharon, Chicago Union of the Homeless



"Without Medicaid, I would not have been able to afford gender confirmation surgery. We need to expand #Medicaid4All - not cut millions of children and adults off from access to healthcare." - Jae, Philly



"I bring home just \$21 over the income eligibility requirements per month, Medicaid ONLY pays for my Medicare premiums and that's it. I've basically quit taking my meds, doing my best to do my best with the knowledge I have and with the things I have accrued over time." - Stacey, Lancaster County



"My children and myself are Medicaid recipients. I'm worried myself and my children will lose our coverage. My children have asthma and need to be able to get their medication and be able to see the doctor" - Joanie, Lancaster County



"My services will be cut soon. I am only 24 Years old. Will I make it to 50? We have to fight back because who else is going to do it?" - Savannah, York County



"Medicaid matters to me and my family because of continuity of care. My kiddo's therapist only takes Medicaid. Anyone who has had any kind of mental health issue knows how important it is to develop a trusting relationship with your therapist. The Medicaid Cuts have interrupted their access to this literally lifesaving healthcare." - Rebecca, Northeast PA



"My one son is autistic and was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukemia about a year ago. He is only 9 years old. I don't know how our family would get through if we didn't have Medicaid. The Medicaid we do have doesn't cover all his medications which is more than enough of what we can handle financially. I can't imagine how worse it would be if we all of a sudden lost our Medicaid all together." - Blanca, York County



"I'm a Medicaid recipient and I'm concerned about the Medicaid Cut-offs. It's very hard and expensive to get health insurance. Without coverage, who knows how long I'll live?" - Tarina Cherry-Blue



2023 Membership Assembly Reflection

October 20-22nd, 2023 Put People First! PA held our 11th Annual Membership Assembly in Williamsport, Northeast PA. This was our first time having a statewide, all together in-person - with virtual option - Assembly since 2019, and it was a big success! The Membership Assembly is our largest yearly gathering and one of our most crucial, as we continue to build our member-led, staff-free, statewide, politically independent movement of the poor and dispossessed united across all lines of division. During the Assembly we grew our leadership and unity as a class through meals together, workshops, *Mistica (spirit of the struggle)* and Arts & Culture.

Every year the Membership Assembly is an opportunity for us to connect, share our experiences, strength, and hope with each other. We celebrated our achievements, processed our challenges, reflected on 2023 and prepared for 2024. There were more than 120 in-person and virtual participants of the Membership Assembly from Pennsylvania and other states including California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey, Texas, Vermont, Wisconsin and Wyoming!

You ask why I give all my time
to Put People First! PA!!!
BECAUSE THEY GIVE ALL
THEIR TIME TO ME!!! Organize
With Put People First! PA
FOREVER!!!

Esther
of Northeast PA

Feeling amazing after going
to my first ever membership
assembly thanks for inviting
me!

Toby
of South Central PA

BLOG LINKS



[Click to read more
about the 2023 MA](#)

This year, I attended my first in-person Membership Assembly. Of all the weekend's memorable experiences, I find myself reflecting most on the tremendous sense of collectivity I felt and its significance for our ongoing movement. The Assembly exemplified our commitment to co-creating the spaces we share.

Some members led workshops while others coordinated essentials like food, transportation, childcare, and A/V. Members had varying levels of responsibility, but, thanks to our militant work schedule, everyone was involved, everyone had a role to play. This simple reality was itself revolutionary!

Throughout our daily lives, we are routinely conditioned to be disengaged, to be little more than consumers. We are taught that there are experts and professionals, and that we have nothing to contribute. Our Membership Assembly provided stark opposition to these ruling-class notions: we studied, learned, prepared, and shared with one another. We held roles—big and small—pushed ourselves to try new things, and created a three-day experience that wouldn't have existed without us!

The significance of organizing such a participatory and empowering event transcends the Membership Assembly. It reflects and reinforces our daily approach to organizing and helps to lay the groundwork for a truly inclusive society, one that respects all of us and allows us to have our needs met and to thrive

Ande
of Southeast PA



Gaza Solidarity The Fight to End the War Economy



In November 2023, Put People First! PA Healthcare Rights Committees held three actions - two in person, [one virtual](#) - to connect the genocide in Gaza, funded by the U.S. government, to the plight of poor and dispossessed people here in the United States.

Here's some of what our leaders had to say.

"We're giving billions of dollars for genocide. To kill babies. To kill innocent men and women. And for what? To have nothing here! Billions and billions of dollars that could be going to make our country a better place ...It has to end! It has to end! We need to come together. We need to defeat them. We are working class people and they don't stand for us. It doesn't matter where in the world we are. They don't stand for us. If you think that you're better than a person in Gaza, you aren't! They think of us all the same. We need to stand together. We need to stand against apartheid. We need to stand against genocide. That's the only way we as working class americans we're going to get what we need here, the healthcare infrastructure, education, we need to rebuild this entire country...

- Kiki

Central Appalachia PA HRC

"Our fight is one and the same. 26 out of 35 hospitals are currently nonfunctional in Gaza. There have been 164 reported attacks on healthcare centers in Gaza since October 7th. In the past year, hospitals are under unprecedented attack in Northeast PA as well. We have witnessed the closures of Tyler Memorial Hospital in Tunkhannock, First Hospital in Kingston, Moses Taylor Hospital in Scranton, and Berwick Hospital. Standing outside of the closed Hahnemann Hospital today, it is plain to see that hospitals are under attack here too.

As we speak, the Medicaid cuts, the largest cuts in 40 years, are robbing literally millions of Americans of access to lifesaving healthcare. It is a lie that Americans support the genocide being carried out by the state of Israel. Over two-thirds of us demand a ceasefire. We don't want any war. We don't want our tax dollars going to wage endless wars against other poor folks just like us."

- Becca

Northeast PA HRC



PPF-PA Member Rebecca Speaking at Gaza Solidarity Action

BLOG LINKS



[Click here to read Kiki's full remarks](#)



[Click here to read Becca's full remarks.](#)

In Celebration, in Memoriam

In celebration: Welcome to the Nonviolent Medicaid Army!

We lift up the shining new additions to our class, who will grow into leaders one day, and our fallen leaders, whose memory will continue to inspire us and whose spirit we will carry with us.



**Newest Member
Southeast PA
Healthcare Rights
Committee**

*Stella (Jacob H. and
Deanna)
November 14, 2023*



**Newest Member
Southwest PA
Healthcare Rights
Committee**

*Zariana (Rica's great
grandchild)
September 24th, 2023*



**Newest Member
Northeast PA
Healthcare Rights
Committee**

*Asunta (Esther's
grandchild)
January 7th, 2024*



**Newest Member
Southwest PA
Healthcare Rights
Committee**

*Aster (Kirsten and
Eleanor)
November 30, 2023*



**Appreciation of our
movement babies
continuing to grow!**

In Celebration, in Memoriam

In Memoriam: Longest Night



As part of the Winter Offensive, the Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) joined up with the National Union of the Homeless for a Longest Night of the Year Memorial in South Central PA.

"These are people who are near and dear to our organizations leaders or leaders in the movement to abolish poverty and community members. These folks did not have to die. They were killed by a system of oppression we all live under. A system that pits us against each other, leading us to punch down versus punching up together. These lives are more than just nameless faces...they are our mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. We are all connected and when one of us suffers we all suffer. Tonight we read these names in hope that no more deaths in the streets will occur." See the full list of names lifted up during the Longest Night Memorial [here](#).

The night before this memorial, the Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) held an Arts & Culture Night dedicated to Wyoming NVMA leader, Erro Lynd. During the event, Erro was at home receiving hospice care from their partner WY-NVMA leader, Julia, friends and family. At the end of art, songs and poems together, Julia shared these words:

When Erro and I met 17 years ago, we were already on our own organizing paths. We had already been fighting in different ways for a while. I've been so flooded with so many memories, with so many stories from other people - the funny ones, the sad ones, the great ones. [...] There's so much I want to say. How angry I am.

How sad that Erro is dying, and how grateful I am for all the support, people flying across the country to help take care of the both of us because until three weeks ago, Erro was taking care of me, and making sure I ate and all that. Now we have people taking care of both of us, and I'm so grateful I could take Erro home.

That makes me think of how many people don't even get this death. I'm so sad they're dying, and how many people don't even get this death and how many people don't even have a home to die in. How many people don't even have the healthcare that Erro did have.

We were still talking about organizing stuff just a few days ago. It's never not been a part of our fight. Our fight is for all of us. And we have personally suffered a lot under this broken messed up system. There's no way I could have Erro at home right now, if people weren't coming here. In that same way, there's no winning if we're not together.

I'm hurting, but the hurting is also more beautiful and meaningful because of the love that we have together as lovers and partners and also as organizers and with our communities and having people with us. There is meaning and beauty in the pain and it's not just pure pain.

When I'm talking to these doctors and I'm angry that hospice only comes for a couple hours a week and they don't get it, they don't understand what I'm talking about with healthcare as a human right. I know they would want it, too, but there's so many people out there who can't yet imagine that it's possible for all of us to truly have what we need every single day, and that is possible, and that doesn't mean we won't die, but we won't die so young, we won't die so brutally, we won't die alone.

We finally found our organizing home here. We've both been organizing at least for 25 years - this is our organizing home with Put People First! PA and the Nonviolent Medicaid Army. This is the place that does have the imagination and the vision and the fight for all of us truly having what we need. [...]

In Celebration, in Memoriam

In Memoriam: Longest Night

I've had a lot of fear about how I'm going to go forward when Erro dies. Life is not separate from this fight. This fight is life. Erro told me I'm going to love you always and forever until I can't anymore, and that's the same way they had the approach to organizing. They went through so many harsh treatments this year, and we were totally imperfect, but we've been fighting and we're gonna keep in this fight. Erro while they're here and when they pass on to another realm, they're gonna be in this fight, always. They're part of me and they're part of all of you. [...] I'm sad, I'm angry, I'm scared a lot of times and I'm grateful because I'm not alone in this, there is another kind of power that's welling up from the togetherness in this.

On the longest night and in the darkest times, there can be singing because we're together and that makes it a blessing and even doable. Thank you everybody for your art, and creativity and your emotion, and your power and your commitment to this fight and finding other people like all of us and beyond to be in this fight together. [...] Erro can't speak right now, but if they could, they would be telling you all how incredibly much they love and appreciate you all for your souls and your spirit and your hearts and your fight, so thank you for being here.



**Erro Lynd passed away December 24th, 18 years after their first cancer diagnosis.
May Erro's memory be for a revolution!**



[Read Julia's full words here.](#)



[Watch Erro and Julia share at 2021 Arts & Culture.](#)



[Read more about Erro's struggle here.](#)

Arts & Culture



By David Greene, painting with nurses, caretakers and the Nonviolent Medicaid Army up against Godzilla, Mt. Aetna, closed hospitals, and prisons.



Painted Rock Table weights by Tammy Rojas, distributed at the 2023 Membership Assembly for Healthcare Rights Committees' tabling on windy days.

Buzz Cuts in Kendrick Park Dedicated to Erro

You blessed me with a memory,
I recall in times of dark.
We sat together planning,
Buzz cuts in the park.

The object seemed straight forward,
The hair cut to complete.
The power for your sheers,
A place to sit and rest your feet.

We found a power outlet,
with a table ten feet away.
But you had only three feet of cord,
I laughed and thought, "oy vey."

So I moved a two-ton table
To the edge of a concrete pad.
This might just work, I thought.
It may not be so bad.

Julia had clippers close at hand,
Erro sat on uneven ground,
Their shoes sunk in the sand.

By Damian Carrillo,
leader with the Wyoming
NVMA

To say things proceeded smoothly,
A rather sanguine claim,
Each passing of the clippers,
Enlisted critiques and suggested
blame.

We laughed until our sides hurt,
Erro's haircut suffered a bit,
But Julia stuck with it,
She really wouldn't quit.

When finally it was finished,
It really was a sight.
All things considered, it turned out,
Somehow, It just looked right.

You blessed me with a memory,
Perhaps upon a lark,
As we sat together laughing,
Giving buzz cuts in the park

*In January, the
Nonviolent Medicaid
Army Winter Study
began with a
dedication to Erro.*

Poem for Julia and Erro

I was stale and complacent and
you fed me.
I saw the waters flow through
human's nature and culture.
You taught me the truth in the
history of civilization.
You showed me love, how to love,
and how to appreciate diversity for
all humankind.

Erro, your calling is pure and just.
All is not in vain.
Your rewards will be honored and
blessed in heaven.
It is time for me to surrender you to
Jesus of Jerusalem,
But I will surely see you again,
In peace and joy.

Last night, Jessie and Jules and
their brother Frank,
In both of your honor,
They bellowed with the bongo
drum,
To the night spirit energy of the
cosmos
For strength, courage and smooth
entrance to new beginnings.

Hugs and kisses.
Love you so much.

By Linda Jones,
leader with the Wyoming NVMA

My Son

my son has beautiful eyes of Blue
he got them from my mother

but often in them I see you
O children of Palestine
whose eyes have closed forever

By Frank Scarsella, leader with
the Central-Appalachia HRC



[Watch the dedication
by Nijmie and Mistica,
sung by Briann here.](#)

Mass Poor People's & Low-Wage Workers State House Assemblies & To the Polls!

Movilización masiva de la

Campaña de la Gente Pobre en Harrisburg

Monday, February 5th: National press conference announcing the 40 weeks of action

Lunes 5 de Febrero: Conferencia de Prensa nacional para anunciar 40 semanas de acción

Tuesday, February 20th: State press conferences and meetings with state legislative leadership

Lunes 19 de Febrero: Conferencias de Prensa y reuniones con líderes legislativos estatales

Saturday, March 2nd:
Mass Assemblies
Sábado 2 de Marzo:
Asambleas Masivas

Monday, March 4th: Demand delivery to elected officials in statehouse

Lunes 4 de Marzo: Entregar nuestras demandas a los legisladores en el capitolio

June: National Mobilization in D.C.

Junio: Movilización Nacional en D.C.

On Saturday March 2nd the Poor People's Campaign will hold simultaneous mass poor people's and low wage worker statehouse assemblies at State Capitals across the country in more than 30 states including here in Pennsylvania.

800 people are dying from poverty every day in the U.S. The Poor People's campaign research shows that poverty is the 4th leading cause of death in the U.S. The 140 million people in this country who are poor and low income are a sleeping giant. Our job is to organize poor & low income people! We have to take action together and this mobilization is part of that

El sábado 2 de Marzo, la Campaña de la Gente Pobre tendrá asambleas masivas simultáneamente de personas pobres y trabajadores de bajos salarios en las capitales de los estados de todo el país en más de 30 estados, incluido aquí en Pensilvania.

800 personas mueren de pobreza cada día en los EE. UU. La pobreza es la cuarta causa principal de muerte en los EE. UU. Los 140 millones de personas pobres y de bajos ingresos de este país son un gigante dormido. ¡Nuestro trabajo es despertarlos! Tenemos que actuar juntos para lograrlo y esta movilización es parte de eso.



[Register here!](#)

SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2024

HARRISBURG, PA

MORAL MARCH ON HARRISBURG AND TO THE POLLS!

11:30am: Gather at Grace
United Methodist Church
1pm: Statehouse Assembly
at the Harrisburg Capitol
Complex

**A DAY OF NATIONALLY-COORDINATED, SIMULTANEOUS
DIRECT ACTION ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY.**

CALLING ALL PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN & DEMAND

**LIVING WAGES,
HEALTHCARE,
VOTING RIGHTS &
STOPPING VOTER SUPPRESSION,
EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL,
WORKER/LABOR RIGHTS,
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE,
ACCESS TO HOUSING,
FULLY-FUNDED
PUBLIC EDUCATION,
ABOLISHING POVERTY,
AND THE UNITY OF LOVE,
NOT THE DIVISION OF HATE.**

**BRING THE DEMANDS OF 140 MILLION
POOR & LOW-WEALTH PEOPLE
DIRECTLY TO LAWMAKERS AT STATE CAPITOLS.
EVERYBODY IN, NOBODY OUT!**

**WE MUST CHALLENGE POVERTY BEING THE 4TH
LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN THIS COUNTRY!**

**WE MUST ACTIVATE 85 MILLION
POOR & LOW-WEALTH ELIGIBLE VOTERS!**

WE WON'T BE SILENT ANYMORE!

RSVP HERE



**REPAIRERS
OF THE FUBAR** **Put People's Campaign** **KAIROS CENTER** **Put People's Campaign**

Stay in touch!

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Email: info@putpeoplefirstpa.org

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Twitter: @PPF_PA

Instagram: @putpeoplefirst_pa



Bonus Video:

*National Nonviolent Medicaid
Army Week of Action! 2023*

