

# FOLLOW-UP: Florida's Medicaid call center still plagued by long wait times and even higher disconnect rates, preventing eligible families and children from keeping their healthcare

Soon a million Floridians will have lost healthcare coverage because of poor infrastructure and bureaucratic red tape.

From April to December 2023, the number of Floridians with Medicaid coverage fell by [911,000](#), including 420,000 children. Put differently, Medicaid coverage in Florida declined by 17%—more than any other state except for Texas.

Caught in the middle of these precipitous health coverage losses are Floridians who are unable to connect with the system online or by taking time off work to visit a social services office to have their Medicaid redetermined.

This latest analysis, conducted between January 5–22, 2024, aimed to investigate call center wait times and measure the effectiveness of Florida's newly launched Medicaid management website in reducing a call center's call volume.

## Key findings included:

- Regardless of language, **eight in ten calls had their call automatically disconnected** from the DCF phone system, 80% for English and 82% for Spanish callers.
- When people were able to get through, they experienced prolonged delays far exceeding the 30-minute typical maximum break time at work:
  - Callers on the **English helpline** experienced a **66-minute average wait time to get a live person**, which is almost double what it was in July 2023.
  - The average **wait time for a Spanish-language caller to get a live person was 47 minutes**, which is an hour and 35 minutes less compared to July 2023.
  - The **longest wait time someone experienced was 134 minutes** in English and just under 2 hours in Spanish.

**Table: Wait times and termination rates at Florida's Medicaid call center, by callers' language** (January 2024)

		English	Spanish
<b>For completed calls, the time between call initiation and first human response</b> (in hours and minutes)	Average	1:06	0:47
	Median	1:01	0:39
	Longest wait	2:14	1:59
	Shortest wait	0:11	0:08
<b>Percentage of calls that were disconnected</b>		<b>80%</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>For disconnected calls, the time between call initiation and disconnection</b> (in hours and minutes)	Average	0:06	0:04
	Median	0:03	0:04
	Longest wait	1:35	0:19
	Shortest wait	0:02	0:03

Even these troubling numbers underestimate Medicaid losses, because they include offsetting enrollment increases by new families. Altogether, [the state has terminated 1.3 million Floridians](#), including 730,000 people who may have been eligible but were disenrolled for procedural reasons—typically because the state did not have the proper infrastructure in place to receive the information required from Medicaid families.

These latest findings come after UnidosUS published a report in August 2023 that sought to better understand how hard-working Floridians were able to renew their Medicaid over the phone during the “Medicaid unwinding,” since many beneficiaries without computer access rely on the state’s phone system. At the time, callers were experiencing:

- A **36-minute wait** for the average **English-language caller**.
- A wait lasting **142 minutes** for the average **Spanish-language caller**—nearly four times the wait imposed on the average English-language caller.
- Almost **a third (30%) of all Spanish-language calls were disconnected** before the caller reached a human being.

Shortly afterward, the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) staff testified to the [Florida Senate Appropriations Committee on Health and Human Services](#) that the average wait time for their call center was only five minutes, but then also announced a modernized version of the Florida ACCESS website that would help beneficiaries manage their Medicaid coverage.

## A Widespread Problem Affecting Millions

After receiving complaints from viewers, Central Florida's ABC news affiliate, [WFTV Channel 9, also conducted its own investigation](#) regarding wait times (in-person and over the phone) and high disconnect rates with the DCF helpline.

Findings from both investigations reveal that even when a caller actually gets through, DCF's "solution" to long call center wait times was to immediately hang up the phone for the vast majority of callers. Even so, when people persist with enough calls to avoid disconnection, or if people get lucky and bypass the disconnection process, they still must wait almost an hour, regardless of the language they speak. According to DCF's [own call data reported to Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services](#), as of October 2023, the most recent month for which these data are available, [Florida's average wait time was 33 minutes, or the fourth-highest wait time reported by any state.](#)

Call centers play a vital role for beneficiaries who need hands-on help from a trained employee that cannot be done effectively in person or by interacting with the ACCESS website. Given the schedule of the average blue-collar worker and the limited number of local DCF offices, call centers are the only realistic option for those eligible for Medicaid.

A well-functioning, customer-centered call center allows beneficiaries to use their limited free time during the workday to get the help they need during a break or lunch instead of needing to take paid or unpaid time off work.

Unfortunately, the call center continues to be unreliable while the state's complex ACCESS website can be hard for many people to navigate, even for trained professionals, making the call center that much more important.

Lastly, call centers serve as a bridge for those trapped in the digital divide, who cannot access the State's website due to limited broadband or internet access. To date, Florida's executive branch leadership has failed to fulfill its duty to its constituents by providing a functioning call center for their Medicaid program needs. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Floridians are having their healthcare terminated for procedural reasons.

This is why the Office of Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services had to remind states like Florida last year of their requirement to ["adequately fund and staff call centers to ensure they are accessible without prolonged delays."](#)

## Florida Hispanic voters want elected leaders to address the state's healthcare crisis.

Last fall, a [UnidosUS poll of likely Hispanic voters in Florida](#) showed healthcare as the third most important priority for the community. When asked what they want elected officials to address when it came to healthcare, the biggest concerns were high healthcare costs and the cost of prescription medication. Closely behind those two concerns was the need to have a higher quality of healthcare from providers and facilities.

Moreover, 79% of voters approve of Florida accepting federal government funds to provide health insurance to low-income adults by expanding Medicaid, including 72% of Republicans and 74% of Independents. Given how highly healthcare polls with Hispanic voters, it is critical that DCF redoubles its efforts to prevent more eligible Floridians from being wrongfully terminated from Medicaid, a step that [doubles the proportion of families who are charged unaffordable healthcare costs](#).

## Conclusion

Helping children grow up healthy and strong needs to be a top priority for all of Florida's leaders. After two "secret shopper" programs and a WFTV Channel 9 investigation uncovering the state's inability to provide basic customer call center support, it is clear that the State of Florida is in violation of federal law. The number of Floridians covered by Medicaid has fallen by nearly one million people, including 420,000 children, shining a spotlight on failed state leadership and designed-to-fail call center schemes. Florida needs to invest the necessary money in the ACCESS Florida hotline that gives families timely access to hands-on support to resolve their Medicaid questions and provide the information needed to renew their healthcare, regardless of the beneficiaries' spoken language.

## Methodological Appendix

From January 5 through 22, 2024, two UnidosUS staff members called the Florida Department of Children and Families Information Line, 850-300-4323, at specific times and days. Staff members made 49 "secret shopper" calls in English and 36 in Spanish. Calls were arranged so that one call began in each language at 9 am, at 11 am, at 1 pm, and at 3 pm on a Monday, a Tuesday, a Wednesday, a Thursday, and a Friday. To prevent our calls from taking time away from beneficiaries, callers hung up as soon as a human being picked up the line. The call center presented all callers with an automated prompt asking English callers to press 1, Spanish callers to press 2, and Creole callers to press 3. Our English caller pressed 1, and our Spanish caller pressed 2, routing each caller to a language-specific queue. The call center's message then provided information. After that, it asked callers (a) to input their Social Security number or family access number or (b) to speak to a representative by saying, "general information." Our callers selected the latter option.



This choice led to a second set of prompts asking callers to press \* (star) on their keypad if they were calling about Medicaid redetermination and renewal. Other options were to press 1 for general program information, 2 for healthcare provider options, 3 for other Medicaid questions, 4 for EBT questions, 5 for SUNCAP, 6 to report fraud, 7 to apply for benefits, and 8 for legal services. Our callers pressed the star key, indicating that they were calling about Medicaid redetermination and renewal. The prompts and our responses were identical in English and Spanish.

A Microsoft Excel file showing the language, date, time, duration, and disposition of each call is available upon request.

## About Us

UnidosUS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves as the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Since 1968, we have challenged the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos through our unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an [Affiliate Network](#) of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. We believe in an America where economic, political, and social progress is a reality for all Latinos, and we collaborate across communities to achieve it.

For more information on UnidosUS, visit [www.unidosus.org](http://www.unidosus.org), or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [X](#).