

On May 15, 2017, Health Care for the Homeless CEO Kevin Lindamood was a featured speaker at the Medicaid Public Forum sponsored by the Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative. We should all take a moment to read his remarks—made all the more poignant (and serendipitous) by the very day that it was: May 15.

Today is May 15th. It brings to mind the opening line of a favorite book. I promised my daughter I'd read it to you.

“On the 15th of May in the Jungle of Nool in the heat of the day in the cool of the pool he was splashing, enjoying the jungle’s great joys, when Horton the elephant heard a small noise.”

Horton Hears a Who, by the great Dr. Seuss. It tells the story of a mighty elephant who has certain knowledge of something that he simply can't get those in power to recognize. Horton sees humanity – in fact an entire world – where no one else can see it. And it's a matter of life and death.

Sound familiar?

Each of us understands from our daily work or from personal experience that access to health care provided through Medicaid is indeed a matter of life and death.

At Health Care for the Homeless, we remember clearly the days when the majority of those we served weren't insured by Medicaid or anything else – because it wasn't that long ago. In fact, until 2014, just 3-½ years ago, only 30% of our clients were covered by Medicaid or Medicare. The rest – 70% – were uninsured. Because of Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, today 90% of our clients have Medicaid or Medicare—and much greater access to the care they need to get off the streets. We know all too well what the pre-Medicaid expansion days were like. And we can't go back. Don't let anyone tell you that people don't die on the streets in America. Don't let anyone tell you that people don't die because they don't have access to health care.

Some modern readers have criticized Horton Hears a Who for being paternalistic. They claim it sets up an uncomfortable dichotomy of big Horton saving the tiny Whos. But those critics obviously haven't read the book. (Kind of like certain members of Congress who haven't read the American Health Care Act, right?) Horton was caged by those in power. Tied up in rope. Imprisoned. No one believed him. He couldn't do anything. It was the broader community that came together to save themselves, chanting:

We are here. We are here. We are here. We are here.

We must be that community. We are that community. We must make every Who holler and make every Who shout. Governor Hogan, who understands the critical importance of Medicaid in Maryland must holler and shout. We know that Medicaid saves lives and we can't go back.