



COMMENTARY

Opinion: Cleveland must be brave enough to care

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Two people holding hands (Joseph & Mary's Home)

AS By **Anna Stormer, Joseph Marys Home**

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Ohio leads the nation in the number of residents losing Affordable Care Act marketplace coverage. In just one year, over 160,000 Ohioans lost coverage — an alarming 32% decline and nearly three times the national rate. With new federal changes taking effect, as many as 356,000 more Ohioans could soon lose Medicaid coverage.

While our statistics are staggering, they are not just numbers; they represent real people. For our neighbors experiencing homelessness, losing health coverage is not simply a data point. It is often a matter of life and death. Even a brief interruption in care can have devastating consequences for someone already living without stable housing.

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**JOSEPH & MARY'S HOME***A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System*

At Joseph & Mary's Home, we see what happens next.

For 26 years, we've served as Northeast Ohio's only medical respite facility for adults experiencing homelessness. Our mission centers on providing a bridge between hospitalization and ongoing care for unsheltered individuals who need medical support to safely heal. Residents arrive with cancer, heart disease, diabetes, wounds and physical disabilities, often alongside mental illness, trauma and the effects of years without stable housing.

Our residents need a place to heal, help with managing medications and transportation to appointments. They need medical supervision, case management, assistance securing benefits and support transitioning to stable housing. Most importantly, they need to be treated with dignity, as a person, and not a number.

Without medical respite, the alternatives are grim. A person may be discharged to a shelter, or back to the street. There, keeping a wound clean, refrigerating medication, maintaining an oncology schedule or getting to and from appointments becomes nearly impossible.

Predictably, people become sicker and return to the emergency room.

High cost, high cruelty

This cycle is cruel, ineffective and extraordinarily expensive.

In-patient hospital care can cost an average of \$3,000 to \$5,000 per person, per day. Without somewhere appropriate to heal, the average hospital stay lasts four days longer, with a much greater likelihood of needing to be re-admitted. By comparison, we provide medical support, housing stabilization and connections to services for less than \$300 per resident, per day.

This makes our work not only compassionate, but also one of the most financially responsible investments healthcare and economic systems can make.

However, Joseph & Mary's Home cannot meet this need alone.





Anna Stormer (Joseph & Mary's Home)

We already receive more referrals than we have beds. Chronic homelessness in Cuyahoga County increased by more than 50% between 2022 and 2025. As more Ohioans lose health coverage, medical conditions will go untreated, people will become sicker and requests for our limited beds will grow.

This moment demands courage.

October 2026 marks the 175th anniversary of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine (CSA) arriving in Cleveland. They bravely entered a community confronting disease and suffering. They did not wait for the work to become easy. They stepped forward because vulnerable people needed them.

Their courage helped build Cleveland's current healthcare safety net. It is our turn to stand strong as they did, to be brave precisely because the road ahead is difficult.

Being brave means protecting access to Medicaid and affordable health coverage. It means recognizing medical respite as an essential part of our regional infrastructure. And, it means investing in the organizations providing care on the front lines.

A collective responsibility

Sustaining this work is a collective responsibility. Support allows organizations like ours to keep beds open and continue providing care when federal funding cuts reshape our community.

No one should be expected to recover from a serious illness alone or in unsafe conditions. No one should be forced to choose between stable housing, medication or food. And no medical provider or social worker should have to discharge a patient into homelessness or unstable housing because our community failed to provide a safe place for that person to continue healing.

For 175 years, the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine have shown Cleveland what courageous service looks like. Their example reminds us when circumstances are

difficult and the need is greatest, we stand together. We protect our neighbors. We build what our community needs.

Now is the time for Cleveland to be brave enough to care.

Anna Stormer is executive director of Joseph & Mary's Home, a ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System that provides homeless medical respite services in Northeast Ohio.

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