



Good afternoon everyone.

I'm Holly Jensen, and I am honored to tell you about how the ACA and Medicaid have saved my life.

I own a small business, which helps nonprofits and social enterprises with their communications and fundraising. I'm a really hard worker, and I **love** what I do. Most of my business comes through referral for causes I support. And I'm really, really proud to say, I'm good at my work.

But being part of the gig economy comes with risk. If I don't produce, I do not not get paid and I don't get vacation or sick days. So when the Affordable Care Act passed, it was a huge relief. I never had health insurance until the ACA.

During this time, I was also living with undiagnosed depression, anxiety, and obsessive compulsive disorder that began to severely impact my life. Something easy that would take me an hour to do, started to take all day..... and felt insurmountable.

I remember one project I was excited to work was for the Compassionate Communication Center for Ohio, which involved their efforts around Mideast peace activism. After working so hard to prepare, it became clear my disorders were flaring up, I was falling apart, and I had to cancel an important work trip at the last minute. I couldn't do it. My anxiety was getting out of control, and the worse it got, the more out of control my OCD got.

The experience was horrible, and embarrassing. It was one of many opportunities I began to lose out on as my disorders went untreated.

My increasing inability to function dealt a blow not only to my bank account and my livelihood - but also to my self-respect. I withdrew from my community and my volunteer work in the arts world, which often involved organizing events at local, independent stores run by fellow small business owners. My once active life became empty and small. I felt like I was slipping out of society.

However, **the most painful aspect of going untreated was seeing my relationships with my loved ones crumble, including my mom.** She is my best friend in the world. She lives three blocks from me, and my brother lives one block away. Yet weeks **would go by** without so much as answering a text message from them.



About a year ago, I hit rock bottom. I couldn't keep up with my premiums - or any bill. It was winter in Cleveland, and I didn't have a car. So I walked through the sleet and the snow to get to the Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland, which was luckily nearby. At that point, I didn't have anywhere else to turn. Asking for help was really humbling. **But I was scared for my life, not just my livelihood.**

My mind was so addled, I didn't even know how to begin filling out the paperwork. The woman at the clinic walked me through it, and treated me with respect, while efficiently assisting me as I tried to figure out how on earth I was going to regain my life.

I felt like a person who deserved care.

Even before the process of receiving treatment started, that glimmer of hope meant so much... that I wasn't a disposable person.

It took so long to ask for help. If I would have been turned away that day, I may have lost hope.

If they said I needed to have regular employment in order to access Medicaid, I definitely would have continued on my downward spiral.

Requiring employment for Medicaid would have been like telling me you'd throw me a life preserver *after* I stop drowning.

My psychiatric care has given me the foundation on which to rebuild my life. I take medications now and also meet weekly with a psychoanalyst, who helps me continue my progress. And I do an enormous deal of work on my own to heal and grow.

This care not only saved my life, but also gave me *back* my life. Thanks to Medicaid, I am becoming the professional I want to be again - and the *person* I want to be again. I have faith in growing my business, not just keeping it alive. I'm back to the working with Compassionate Communication Center of Ohio, doing their site redesign and creating materials, and I love working with my love working other clients.

I'm once again organizing and participating in arts events in my community. And I'm volunteering at my local recovery clubhouse, applying my communications and development skills to help *them* continue to support the community. I'm reconnecting with my friends and loved ones. Perhaps most important, I'm restoring my relationship with my mom. **It feels good to pay my bills - but moreso, to be a part of something.**



Mental health is **no joke**. Without Medicaid, I know I would have eventually depended on emergency care, taxpayer-funded rehab, and the legal system. I would have cost taxpayers ***much more*** than the expense of my basic care now.

My goal is to continue healing, regain my earning potential, regain my **private** health coverage, and happily support Medicaid & Medicare through my tax dollars. Despite the relatively high tax rate for self-employed people, I would be **proud** to support these life-saving (and tax dollar-saving) programs.

I know I'm not alone. We cannot afford to destroy and discard the ACA and Medicaid for millions of people that could be turned away. For me, it would have meant discarding me right when I needed support the most.

Thank you for allowing me to share my story.