



The Politics of Medicaid

Laura Katz Olson

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In 1965, the United States government enacted legislation to provide low-income individuals with quality health care and related services. Initially viewed as the friendless stepchild of Medicare, Medicaid has grown exponentially since its inception, becoming a formidable force of its own. Funded jointly by the national government and each of the fifty states, the program is now the fourth most expensive item in the federal budget and the second largest category of spending for almost every state. Now, under the new, historic health care reform legislation, Medicaid is scheduled to include sixteen million more people.

Laura Katz Olson, an expert on health, aging, and long-term care policy, unravels the multifaceted and perplexing puzzle of Medicaid with respect to those who invest in and benefit from the program. Assessing the social, political, and economic dynamics that have shaped Medicaid for almost half a century, she helps readers of all backgrounds understand the entrenched and powerful interests woven into the system that have been instrumental in swelling costs and holding elected officials hostage. Addressing such fundamental questions as whether patients receive good care and whether Medicaid meets the needs of the low-income population it is supposed to serve, Olson evaluates the extent to which the program is an appropriate foundation for health care reform.

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