Prior to the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) insurance companies were legally entitled to deny medical coverage to any person with a so-called “pre-existing condition.” For decades the industry had excluded people with illnesses that ranged from cancer to depression to asthma and in the process subjugated those struggling to personal hardship, bankruptcy, and even death. The ACA altered the healthcare landscape by privileging patients above profits and prohibiting corporations from classifying bodies as *a priori* liabilities, even as the law fell short of universal coverage. Citizens embraced these long-overdue protections as an extension of the public good and repeatedly expressed support for their implementation in opinion polls. In fact, when the American Healthcare Act (AHCA), known colloquially as Trumpcare, threatened these safeguards, healthcare advocates deployed the phrase “pre-existing conditions” as one of the central organizing tropes of public debate and political deliberation. This talk takes up the rhetorical plasticity of the concept “pre-existing conditions” in public exchanges about the AHCA. The term “pre-existing conditions” illustrates how the conceptual dynamics of bureaucratic language can shape vernacular understandings of law and rhetorically reconstitute the logics of policy making. I argue that pre-existing conditions have moved from a rhetoric of risk to a rhetoric of access and that discursive shift empowered communities that sought to preserve patient protections. I anticipate this talk to unfold in three steps: first, I perform a brief rhetorical history of the phrase “pre-existing conditions.” Next, I explore how pre-existing conditions came to occupy a pivotal role in dialogues about the AHCA. Finally, I engage the ways activist organizations such as ADAPT took up the idea of “pre-existing conditions” to expand their rhetorical corpus and forge identifications across a range of bodies. Activist groups both universalized the idea of pre-existing conditions among diverse populations and simultaneously utilized that rhetoric to address particular political exigencies.