

At the April 4, 2019 meeting of the Medi-Cal Children's Health Advisory Panel (MCHAP), California Department of Health Care Services Director Jennifer Kent responded to a January 24 letter from MCHAP that made recommendations to improve communications between DHCS and Medi-Cal beneficiaries and their families. MCHAP members requested a written account of those responses.

This document includes the recommendations from the MCHAP letter, along with added text summarizing the Director's remarks in response from the April 4 meeting.

Recommendations on DHCS' website:

1. Make help easy to find

- a. "Contact Us" tab should be more visibly prominent, with preference for changing to the word "Help" instead.
 - i. The Medi-Cal help line phone number should appear in large text next to the "Contact Us" or "Help" tab.
- b. Improve contact information within each document or on the website by always including a phone number or link/email address for assistance (including how to appeal a decision regarding eligibility for medical, dental or behavioral health benefits). Repeat the link or phone number or other contact information whenever it is referenced, so that the beneficiary does not have to navigate away from the page to follow the instruction. Examples from the Office of the Ombudsman's "[Common Questions and Issues](#)" document would include:
 - i. "Yes, the Office of the Ombudsman can help you. You may call us or e-mail your request for help to MMCDOmbudsmanOffice@dhcs.ca.gov."
 - ii. When stating phrases such as "You may call us," always provide/repeat the number right there for easy reference.
 - iii. Similarly: "If you no longer have a private health plan or you have a problem regarding other health insurance, you should call your Medi-Cal eligibility worker."
 1. We would suggest having a link or phone number right at the end of that sentence, so that again the person does not need to navigate away from the page to follow the instructions.
- c. Improve site accessibility to exceed the requirements of Assembly Bill 434.

Jennifer Kent: DHCS is updating the website to make help easier to find. By aligning with the current state template and Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, the DHCS website will include a responsive design with persistent headers. Under this new template, DHCS will consider updating the page with additional beneficiary-focused content.

Along with the new template changes, DHCS intends to add the Medi-Cal Help Line number to more prominent areas on the home page. Additionally, a banner was added to the website with the Medi-Cal Help Line number. The message appears in both English and Spanish.

DHCS is assessing a new tool that scans the website for key phrases, such as “contact us” or “you may call us.” Once key phrases are identified on the webpages, missing contact information can be included. Trainings will be made available to DHCS staff to consistently list contact information throughout forms and other documents posted to the website.

Statute requires that the DHCS Director and CIO, by July 1, 2019, certify that each DHCS public website meets accessibility standards, including the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1.

2. Make help easy to use and understand for all

- a. Ensure literacy levels on website are at the 6th grade reading level, or below. In addition, mechanisms should be developed and implemented to make the website information more accessible to families or individuals with limited education and/or literacy levels including:
 - i. Ensure that explanation of Medi-Cal is clear and concise to beneficiaries (refer to [Covered California page](#)).
 - ii. If the material is particularly complex or difficult to understand, then include language similar to, “please call the following number if you need help understanding this.”
 1. This message should be available in different languages.
 - iii. Include reassuring language in materials or on the website such as, “We’re here to help,” or, “Please call us if you have any questions.”
 - iv. Include audio options in different languages for beneficiaries so they can listen to how to apply to Medi-Cal, who qualifies for Medi-Cal, the different ways to apply, and contact information.
- b. Include additional language options on website, such as (but not limited to):
 - i. Include link, “Español,” on the DHCS website in the upper right hand corner of the page. This link should redirect to a new page describing what Medi-Cal is and how to apply in Spanish.
 - ii. Include a chat feature (in various languages) for the beneficiaries at key points throughout the website.
- c. Design a Medi-Cal help line banner that is in Spanish.
 - i. For the “Medi-Cal Enrollment, Open Year Round” banner, include an “Español” option in the right hand corner of the banner that will redirect to a new page in Spanish.

Jennifer Kent: DHCS is evaluating a tool that can scan the website pages and flag language that is above the sixth grade reading level.

DHCS' website includes a [webpage](#), "What is Medi-Cal?" This webpage explains what Medi-Cal is, and links to the "myMedi-Cal: How To Get the Health Care You Need" [guide](#) and a Frequently Asked Questions about Medi-Cal [webpage](#).

As the new website is implemented, DHCS will evaluate approaches to make language assistance more readily available. Additional funding would be necessary to offer audio options in different languages. Google Translate, and other translation applications or plug-ins, are currently inadequate translation sources. Additionally, DHCS does not have approved funding for enabling a chat feature on the website.

Following implementation of the new website template, DHCS will develop an Español link on the main page of the website that redirects to a web page in Spanish detailing how to apply for Medi-Cal.

3. Add useful content

- a. Content on the website should be current.
 - i. Additional pages should be added to the website, including information about Emergency or Limited Medi-Cal, and information for young adults aging out of Medi-Cal who were covered by SB 75.
- b. Improve quality reporting (e.g.: comparisons of plans available for each county) on DHCS' Health Care Options website.
- c. Include a section for new beneficiaries on the website where all of the welcome notices and myMedi-Cal PDF can be found.
- d. Include copies of annual notices.
- e. Include information regarding services available to college students and foster youth/former foster youth.
- f. Include information on how to access services when traveling within and outside California or outside the United States.

Jennifer Kent: DHCS is creating a content life cycle policy that would address issues with outdated information. Additionally, this internal policy would require divisions to update their content every 6-12 months, and update document publication dates where applicable and allowed by law.

Developing new website content would require reassigning resources from program areas. This content could be developed as part of the broader effort to update and make accessible the thousands of existing web pages, but additional resources would be needed to prioritize content development.

A health plan comparison is on the Customer Service Portal, the internet site that provides Health Care Options program information and answers to frequently asked questions.

DHCS designed a new [webpage](#), myMedi-Cal, which will list the myMedi-Cal PDF.

DHCS intends to create an additional webpage that will include copies of welcome notices and annual notices.

Recommendations on DHCS' written communications:

1. Make sure notices and letters from DHCS are easy to understand

- a. Ensure literacy levels on all notices and letters are at the 6th grade reading level, or below.
- b. Maintain consistent font and ensure font size is large enough.
 - i. Content within notices should appear in a single column. Include items in a separate column, boxes, tables, etc. when needed to emphasize action items.
- c. Contact information on written communication should be located in an easy to find spot.
 - i. The Medi-Cal help line phone number, or appropriate program contact number, should appear in large text at the top of each written notice so if the beneficiary does not understand part(s) of the notice, they have a number to contact.
 - ii. Notices should contain at least three forms of contact information (i.e. the direct program line or Medi-Cal help line, fax numbers, email address, address) to reach DHCS, including local resources such as a 211 line if applicable.
 - iii. Contact information should be current and up to date.
- d. Notices should be sent out in the beneficiaries' preferred language. Work toward allowing eligibility workers to input beneficiary information in that preferred language.
- e. Notices/pamphlets should be assembled in proper reading format (not printed upside-down, etc.)

Jennifer Kent: The Department has a stakeholder workgroup that is dedicated to addressing a multitude of issues that impact our Medi-Cal applicants and beneficiaries. One of these issues is addressing literacy concerns of written notices. The Consumer Focused Stakeholder Workgroup (CFSW) includes legal aid advocates and county representatives. All of our notices are translated and professionals revise content to a sixth grade reading level, which is required by statute. Part of the complexity with our notices is that we are mandated to include legal options for beneficiaries, while also striving to make the notices easily understandable.

DHCS adheres to department ADA standards, including the use of standard font type and size, when developing any new form or correspondence or when revising any existing form or correspondence that goes on the DHCS website. Existing forms and correspondence are revised as funding and workload allows. DHCS will take into consideration options for providing Medi-Cal notices of action (NOAs) in a standard format, as currently NOAs are mailed by counties using different prescribed formats that are also utilized by other social services programs.

DHCS ensures that all new forms and correspondence are tested for readability, and that any existing form or correspondence that is undergoing revision is tested for readability, prior to releasing the notification on the DHCS website. Existing forms and correspondence are revised as funding and workload allows. DHCS will take into consideration options for providing Medi-Cal NOAs in a standard format, as currently NOAs are mailed by counties using different prescribed formats that are also utilized by other social services programs.

DHCS strives to include the Medi-Cal help line phone number or appropriate program contact number, as well as multiple forms of contact information, on each written notice provided by DHCS. We will raise this concern with the CFSW regarding specific notices that do not include contact information as appropriate. All Medi-Cal NOAs currently provide multiple forms of contact information.

Eligibility workers are already enabled to select the beneficiaries' preferred language from among the 19 languages supported by DHCS. Where a notification has been translated, it will be provided to the beneficiary in their preferred language.

2. Ensure that written communications are not sent to beneficiaries with confusing and conflicting information

- a. Often, beneficiaries receive multiple mailed communications with conflicting messages on the same day. DHCS should develop written communications that include a clear effective date and information that makes it clear they may receive additional updated communications.
- b. DHCS should work with Covered California and CalHEERS to develop an easy to understand eligibility form for families that may be covered through multiple systems of care, replacing separate notices for each family member.

Responses approved April 2019