

Medi-Cal Children's Health Advisory Panel
California Department of Health Care Services
December 9, 2020

Will Lightbourne, Director
Department of Health Care Services
PO Box 997413, MS 0000
Sacramento, CA 95899-7413

RE: Continuation of Existing Waivers

Dear Director Lightbourne,

The Medi-Cal Children's Health Advisory Panel (MCHAP) is an independent, statewide advisory board that is pleased to advise the State Department of Health Care Services on matters relevant to all children enrolled in Medi-Cal.

Due to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, children and families have been less likely to visit a doctor or county Medi-Cal office, and as a result less likely to enroll in Medi-Cal. In fact, even before the pandemic began, California saw a drop in the number of children enrolled in Medi-Cal. According to our Medi-Cal Children's Health Dashboard (September 2020), ending Q1 of 2017 there were 5.65 million children enrolled in Medi-Cal, which dropped at the ending Q1 of 2020 to 5.17 million. While some of that change was due to increased take-up in employer-based coverage, over the same time period, the estimated number of uninsured California children increased by 60,000.

Now, during our current Public Health Emergency, states have experienced the highest increases in unemployment to the point that California Employment Development Department had to temporarily halt new claims during the emergency at the beginning of Q4 of 2020. At the same time, according to the published report, "Medi-Cal Monthly Eligible Fast Fact, September 2020", Medi-Cal had their first increase in enrollment since Q1 of 2016. It is important that we work at reversing the number of uninsured children while protecting existing enrollees, as soon as possible, by ensuring that all eligible children are enrolled (and continue eligibility) in Medi-Cal while ensuring that upon the conclusion of our current Public Health Emergency the Department is able to function, without interruption in enrollment activities.

Based on our board's experience, under the former Managed Risk Medical Insurance Board, during Q3 of 2009 when enrollment was frozen, the long-term effects of interruptions in coverage options would be devastating to the children of California. It is critically important that the state works to ensure all necessary systems and resources are in place to avoid any service

interruptions, either through enrollment or continuation of coverage, for the children and their families.

Therefore, we urge you to work with Mr. Alex M. Azar II, Secretary of Health and Human Services in ensuring the continuation of ALL existing and new waivers granted during the current Public Health Emergency. Specifically, we see the need for the continuation of those waivers related to enrollment, coverage exemptions, and share of costs that have been or are granted during the declared Public Health Emergency, pursuant to his authority, under section 319 of the Public Health Service Act, on January 27, 2020, and renewed in subsequent orders. We recommend their continuation beyond the conclusion of the currently declared Public Health Emergency for at least six (6) months, or for a period of time equal to half the number of days of the current emergency, whichever is greater.

MCHAP members believe this period of time is necessary to help ensure the Department has adequate time to communicate with beneficiaries while processing backlogs created during the emergency. Most importantly, the state must ensure the continuity of coverage for beneficiaries when the Department begins the unprecedented efforts of resolving backlogs, when the time warrants, in the coming months.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kenneth Hempstead
Chair, acting on behalf of the Board

cc: Alex M. Azar II, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 200 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20201

AYES: None (0)
NOES: None (0)
ABSTAIN: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)