

June 5, 2020

Bradley P. Gilbert, MD, MPP, Director  
Department of Health Care Services  
MS 0000  
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Director Gilbert:

The Medi-Cal Children's Health Advisory Panel (MCHAP) is an independent, statewide advisory board, legislatively authorized to advise the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) on matters relevant to all children enrolled in Medi-Cal and their families.

I am writing on behalf of the MCHAP to provide our recommendations intended to ensure DHCS continues to prioritize the health needs of all of California's children and families during this COVID-19 recession, and that the state's Fiscal Year 2020-21 budget supports that priority. With Medi-Cal covering half of California's children, adequate funding for DHCS is vital to California's future.

While the budget proposal before the Legislature preserves direct services to children, the Panel is deeply concerned that it cuts optional benefits for adults, some of them only recently restored after cuts during the last recession. Children rely on families to support them in their health care, and changes that make it harder for adults to receive necessary care cannot help but have consequences for children. This is especially true as the effects of COVID-19 control measures have eroded vaccination rates for children, well-child visits, dental checkups and other vital preventive care.

We urge the Legislature to do everything in its power to preserve services to support children and families, including efforts to ensure access to care in all California communities and integrate physical and behavioral health services as children cope with the increased stressors of the COVID-19 emergency.

In particular, the Panel recommends:

Amendment A\*:

- Ensuring that full funding to expand Medi-Cal coverage to undocumented seniors, as proposed in January, remains intact. A growing number of undocumented individuals aged 65 and older are raising their grandchildren. Without proper health care coverage, the health and well-being of these seniors, and the children they care for, will be negatively affected. This population is at particular risk of contracting COVID-19, developing severe symptoms, and faces higher mortality and morbidity rates. Further, they may not seek immediate care if health coverage is compromised, resulting in more severe cases and potentially deaths.

Amendment B\*\*:

- Restoring funding for the Song-Brown Healthcare Workforce Training programs. Funding for this program is through competitive contracts to primary care residents and other training programs that serve underrepresented minorities in underserved areas. Funding cuts would decimate this program, which would cut resources in underserved urban and rural settings that are needed for comprehensive primary care and family medicine.

In addition, the Panel appreciates the actions already taken to preserve enrollment and ensure access to care through suspension of dis-enrollment and redetermination actions.

Our membership encourages California's leaders, wherever possible, to extend the deadlines for those actions through the full extent of the COVID-19 emergency, through administrative or legislative action, as appropriate.

Sincerely,

Ken Hempstead, M.D.

Chair, Medi-Cal Children's Health Advisory Panel, on behalf of the Panel

CC: Members, Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review  
Members, Assembly Committee on Budget  
Members, Senate Budget Subcommittee #3 on Health and Human Services  
Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #1 on Health and Human Services  
Senate President pro Tempore Toni Atkins  
Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon

- \*This denotes an optional selection for the Panel on ensuring full funding to expand Medi-Cal coverage to undocumented seniors, as proposed in the January budget, remains intact.
- \*\* This denotes an optional selection for the Panel on restoring funding for the Song-Brown Healthcare Workforce Training programs.