State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
Department of Health Care Services

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March 4, 2015

Medi-Cal Eligibility Division Information Letter No.: I 15-04

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
                  ALL COUNTY MEDI-CAL PROGRAM SPECIALISTS/LIAISONS

SUBJECT: Upcoming Changes to the California Healthcare Eligibility, Enrollment and Retention System online Single Streamlined Application

The purpose of this letter is to inform counties of changes to the California Healthcare Eligibility, Enrollment and Retention System (CalHEERS) online Single Streamlined Application (SSApp). These online changes went into effect on March 2, 2015, with the CalHEERS Release Schedule 15.3.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, Covered California (CC) and the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) partnered to create an SSApp for affordable health care coverage. The SSApp is used to apply for a range of affordable health care coverage options, including free or low cost Medi-Cal. The application process can be completed online via CalHEERS application portal, in-person with staff at county offices or with assistance from certified enrollment entities, by phone, fax or mail.

After the implementation of the SSApp, CC and DHCS became aware of areas of the application that could be improved to assist consumers in completing the application process and improve eligibility outcomes. CC and DHCS met extensively throughout 2014 with county staff, stakeholder and community groups to identify barriers or areas of confusion that consumers were experiencing during the application process. As a result, several changes are being made to the CalHEERS online application portal in order to improve the application process and resulting eligibility outcomes for consumers.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

The changes that were made are designed to simplify language and improve applicant understanding. Changes were made to align the online application questions to the paper application. Messaging was added to clarify that Medi-Cal accepts applications any time of the year. Resource links have been built into the online application to provide opportunities for consumers to learn more about specific programs available to them and to obtain help in making the right choices based on their individual situation. Some of the changes include:

- On the Apply for Benefits page – Get Help with Costs - important questions have been repositioned to the beginning of the application to assist consumers in finding out if they are eligible for Medi-Cal or Advanced Premium Tax Credits Cost Sharing Reduction. The question to determine whether the applicant will be subsidized or unsubsidized is now asked right up front. This maximizes the number of people who apply for help paying for coverage and are provided easy access to additional information about no or low cost programs via links on the page.

Links have been added to provide opportunities for consumers to learn more about the following programs:

- The Deemed Infant Program, which provides Medi-Cal for babies who are born to mothers on Medi-Cal at the time of delivery. Deemed infants are automatically eligible and an application is not needed. Messaging informs applicants of who to contact in this situation. A new pop up link is available on the Apply for Benefits page. Applicants will see this pop up which informs them they do not need to complete this application to get health coverage for an infant under the age of one, born to a mother on Medi-Cal at the time of delivery. The applicant can click the link and a separate window opens with access to local social service contact information.

- The Former Foster Youth program, which provides Medi-Cal eligibility up to age 26 to former foster youth who were in foster care in any state or tribe on their 18th birthday or later. No application is needed for these individuals and messaging informs applicants of who to contact in this situation. If the applicant clicks on the applicable link provided on the Apply for Benefits page, they see this pop up which informs them that persons who were formerly in foster care on their 18th birthday, or later, may qualify for no cost Medi-Cal up to age 26, regardless of income, and that for immediate coverage for former foster youth, they should contact the county human services agency.

- Programs for pregnant women. If the applicant clicks on the link provided on this page, they see a pop up which provides a link to important information about programs available to pregnant women.

Additional changes include:

- The Household Introduction page welcomes the applicant to the Household section where they will be asked to provide information regarding the household members. This page has been updated so that the information for the consumer is clearer. Changes are being made in the way necessary family relationship and immigration information is gathered to ensure a proper eligibility determination. The addition of clarifying information regarding what is needed to verify immigration status will lead to more consumers providing appropriate documentation and remaining eligible to coverage.

- Tax Information has been changed to prevent entry of contradictory tax information. For example, if the head of household indicates married filing jointly, spouse cannot select anything other than married filing jointly. It also prohibits an individual from claiming tax filing status of head of household while claimed as a dependent.

- Messaging has been added to the questions surrounding income types and reporting of income to clarify the types of income information requested.

- Applicants are offered the opportunity to register to vote or are informed of the option to go online to register. If the consumer clicks yes, they are immediately directed to the Secretary of State Voting Registration website. They also can request that voter registration materials be mailed to them or can decline to register to vote.

SSApp UPDATE

In addition to these revisions made to the online SSApp, DHCS worked collaboratively with the Center for Health Literacy and CC over the course of 2014 to revise the paper SSApp based on edits received from stakeholders and county feedback. These edits were then field tested in two locations in late 2014. Consumer feedback guided additional modifications that were incorporated into the next revision. Subsequently, the paper application revision has been submitted to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) for an informal review and, upon inclusion of the necessary edits recommended by CMS, DHCS will resubmit the final application for CMS approval. DHCS will notify counties once approvals for final production and release are secured. In the meantime, existing supplies of the current paper application should continue to be used.

If you have questions or require additional information, please contact Lisa Jackson at (916) 552-8429 or by email at Lisa.Jackson@dhcs.ca.gov

Original signed by:

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