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February 1, 1999

TO: All County Welfare Directors
All County Administrative Officers
All County Medi-Cal Program Specialists/Liaisons
All County MEDS Coordinators
All County Public Health Directors
All County Mental Health Directors

Letter No.: 99-06

Ref.: All County Welfare Directors Letter No. 98-38, EMC No. 98102, and EMC No. 98131

The purpose of this letter is to provide counties with implementation instructions for the Bridging program, which was created via passage of this year's budget trailer bill (AB 2780, Chapter 310, Statutes of 1998). The trailer bill also deleted last year's statute authorizing the one-month Continued Eligibility program.

As indicated in previous correspondence, the purpose of the Bridging program is to provide an extra month of no-cost, full-scope health coverage to Medi-Cal-eligible children between ages one and nineteen who would otherwise have a share of cost (SOC) (without consideration of property eligibility) in the month immediately following a period of full-scope, zero-SOC Medi-Cal. To be eligible for the Bridging month, these children must also appear to qualify for the Healthy Families (HF) program, based on information in file, in terms of income, other health coverage and citizenship/immigration status. This "bridging" month allows the child to continue receiving complete coverage, through the same health care delivery system, while the family is provided HF enrollment information and is encouraged to seek low-cost health coverage for the child(ren) under HF.

CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR BRIDGING MONTH

To qualify for the Bridging program, a child must meet the following requirements:

- Be age one or older, but not yet age nineteen; and
- Be otherwise eligible for HF; i.e., a citizen or qualified alien without Other Health Coverage whose net family income (using Medi-Cal methodology) is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level; and

- Irrespective of property eligibility, would have a SOC in the next month following the last zero SOC month in programs including, but not limited to, the following: the 100 percent, 133 percent, Aid to Families with Dependent Children Medically Needy (MN), Blind/Disabled MN, Medically Indigent, or Section 1931 (b) only; or

- Have a SOC in the next month following the last month as an infant in the Income Disregard program upon reaching age one; or

- Be discontinued from the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program or Edwards period and is not eligible for zero-SOC Medi-Cal; or

- Be discontinued from Supplemental Security Income /State Supplementary Program (SSI/SSP) benefits and is eligible only for SOC Medi-Cal under Ramos; or reached the end of the Ramos extension and is eligible only for SOC Medi-Cal; or

- Be discontinued from the Transitional Medi-Cal (TMC) program and there is no eligibility for zero-SOC Medi-Cal.

NOTE: Additional information on children discontinued from SSI/SSP are addressed later in this letter.

DETERMINING BRIDGING PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

To ensure all potential Bridging program eligibles are granted the extra month of no-cost coverage, counties must establish a procedure whereby every case containing eligible children in is evaluated for potential Bridging program eligibility whenever one or more of the children are determined to have a SOC in the next month immediately succeeding a month of full-scope, no-SOC Medi-Cal, regardless of whether or not they are property eligible in the first SOC month.

As we indicated in EMC2 no. 98131, dated October 21, 1998, counties that are not able to implement Aid Code 7X in their systems by December 1, 1998 must flag any cases that would qualify for 7X and place the children in the age-appropriate percentage program aid code for that month only to ensure that these children are not solely SOC-eligible in the Bridging month. Counties are NOT to keep the children in this "interim" percentage program aid code for more than one month. In order to ensure this, counties must include in the transaction a termination date (end of the present month) and a reason for the termination (time-limited; one month). In addition to preventing more than one month of Bridging coverage, this termination date/reason will also facilitate the HF automated intake process, which relies on Medi-Cal Eligibility Data System to ensure that the child's full-scope, zero-SOC Medi-Cal eligibility is ending, thereby clearing the way for HF enrollment.

STATEWIDE AUTOMATED WELFARE SYSTEM (SAWS)

It is unlikely that SAWS and ISAWS counties will be able to reprogram their system logic to accommodate 7X for several months after the December 1, 1998 implementation. Therefore, it is expected that those counties will, as soon as possible, devise a procedure whereby these cases can be processed manually.

Property Eligibility

Please note that the value of a family's personal or real property should never be a factor in determining a child's eligibility for the Bridging month, since the HF program does not have a property requirement. If the child's eligibility for zero-SOC Medi-Cal was originally determined via the new HF/Medi-Cal application (using property disregard), the case file may not contain current family property information. Then, when an income increase would create ineligibility for zero-SOC Medi-Cal and potentially cause the child to have a SOC for the next month, the county has no way of knowing whether the child may be property ineligible (Property Disregard ends when zero-SOC eligibility ends). However, counties are to ignore a child's potential property ineligibility in the Bridging determination. They are only to consider whether the child would have a SOC imposed in the following month without regard to property eligibility/ineligibility.

SSI/SSP CASES

Children who are discontinued from SSI/SSP benefits fall into three categories:

(1) No Longer Disabled

The Department of Health Services (Department) is planning to implement a new program whereby these children will be currently continued on zero-SOC Medi-Cal as long as their family income stays below the applicable Medi-Cal level. If their income later increases to a level that would give them a SOC, they must first be considered for Ramos eligibility. If, as a result of the Ramos determination, the child(ren) would only be eligible for Medi-Cal with a SOC, the child(ren) must then be evaluated for the Bridging program.

(2) Ramos with a free month

If the SSI/SSP discontinuance results in the child getting a free Ramos month, the Department sends them the MC 211 (Ramos) Statement of Facts to complete and return to their local county Medi-Cal office. Because of this free month, continuity of Medi-Cal coverage can be assured while the county determines the children's Medi-Cal Only eligibility. Armed with this updated family information, the county also has the ability to determine Bridging program eligibility, should the Ramos determination find the child(ren) would be eligible solely for SOC Medi-Cal without consideration of property.

(3) Ramos with a SOC in the first month

If the SSI/SSP discontinuance results in the child not getting a free Ramos month, counties must await return of the MC 211 (Ramos) Statement of Facts before they can make a determination of Medi-Cal Only eligibility, as they do not have existing case files on SSI children.

If the county determines that the children qualify as zero-SOC AFDC/MN, Blind or Disabled MN, MI, or one of the percentage programs, they will place the children into one of those categories for the appropriate months, including the prior SOC months. If,

on the other hand, the county determines that the children qualify only for SOC Medi-Cal, they must immediately make a Bridging program determination and make the children eligible for a zero-SOC Bridging month before the impending SOC month.

NOTICE OF ACTION LANGUAGE

Counties are instructed to add the following suggested language to any Notice of Actions (NOAs) which impose a SOC on children who were receiving full-scope, zero-SOC Medi-Cal in the month immediately preceding the SOC month:

Bridging Month approval (to be added to SOC NOA):

"Although your child will have a share of cost in the month indicated above, we have determined that he/she may be eligible for the Healthy Families program, which provides low-cost health coverage to families like yours. For this reason, his/her zero-share-of-cost coverage will continue through the end of ___(month)_____ to give you time to apply for the Healthy Families program for your child."

"The State Department of Health Services will send you a Healthy Families application and information about the program within a week or so. If you do not receive this package by two weeks from the date of this notice, please call the Department (toll-free) at 1-800-880-5305 to request the Healthy Families application."

Counties that send two separate NOAs - one discontinuing percentage program benefits and another establishing SOC eligibility - may add this language to the discontinuance NOA if they prefer. In such situations, however, the discontinuance NOA must also include a note indicating that the child will receive a separate NOA about their ongoing SOC eligibility.

HEALTHY FAMILIES ENROLLMENT INFORMATION

As indicated in the NOA language above, the Department is arranging for MEDS to generate monthly lists that will identify those children ages one through eighteen that the counties have changed from full-scope, zero-SOC Medi-Cal in one month to Medi-Cal with a SOC the next. Using these lists, the Department will then send these families HF information and application materials within approximately one week from the date the NOA is issued.

MANAGED CARE CONTINUITY OF COVERAGE

To ensure continuity of plan coverage, children who are eligible for zero-SOC Medi-Cal through a managed care plan at the time they become eligible for the Bridging program month will not be disenrolled from that plan during the Bridging month. In addition, when they apply for Healthy Families, they will likely be able to continue in the same plan once approved.

If you have any questions regarding this letter or the implementation of the Bridging program, please contact Mr. Tony Plescia of my staff at (916) 657-3185.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY
RICHARD BRANTINGHAM for

Angeline Mrva, Chief
Medi-Cal Eligibility Branch