

DATE: June 30, 2025

All County Welfare Directors Letter No.:25-12

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL COUNTY WELFARE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS
ALL COUNTY MEDI-CAL PROGRAM SPECIALISTS/LIAISONS
ALL COUNTY HEALTH EXECUTIVES
ALL COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH DIRECTORS
ALL COUNTY MEDS LIAISONS

SUBJECT: ALTERNATE FORMATS REQUEST PROCESS FOR VISUALLY
IMPAIRED APPLICANTS AND MEMBERS (REFERENCE
MEDI-CAL ELIGIBILITY DIVISION LETTERS [21-31](#) AND [19-18](#))

Purpose

The purpose of this All-County Welfare Directors Letter (ACWDL) is to provide guidance to the counties for the Department of Health Care Services' (DHCS) Alternate Formats Request process that replaces the guidance previously outlined in [MEDIL 21-31](#). The Alternate Format Requests from counties will transition from the DHCS manual process to a California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) process.

This letter outlines the policy and procedures of the automated Medi-Cal Alternate Formats Request process for counties to accommodate the communication needs of Medi-Cal applicants and members. This process enhancement is part of DHCS' continued effort to support counties in providing effective communication with all Medi-Cal applicants and members.

Background

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law that requires services, programs, and activities provided by public entities be accessible to qualified individuals with a disability, such as a visual impairment. (See 42 U.S.C. 126, sections 12010 et seq). DHCS and its county agents are subject to this accessibility mandate. Accordingly, DHCS and the counties must provide visually impaired Medi-Cal applicants and members with communications in the individuals' requested alternate format. The Alternate Formats Request process is to assist blind or visually impaired Medi-Cal applicants and members with obtaining forms and notices in their requested alternate format.

Policy

Effective May 19, 2025, the CalSAWS alternate format functionality will replace the manual alternate format request process outlined in MEDIL 21-31 and will be available

for county use. Counties should discontinue use of the DHCS SFTP folders for alternate format requests. The alternate format requests will now be made in CalSAWS for all counties moving forward. Also effective with this letter, counties should discontinue use of the large font library on the DHCS SFTP.

Applicants and members should make AFS selections in BenefitsCal.com, Covered CA or with their local county office.

Counties will utilize CalSAWS for updating members' or authorized representatives' alternate format preference. The six alternate format options currently available and considered standard are: large print, audio CD, data CD, braille, encrypted audio CD, and encrypted data CD. Members and authorized representatives may also request "County Support," such as county staff reading print documents to individuals over the phone. If encrypted formats are required, the mailing will include printed and non-encrypted audio instructions about how to open the encrypted material.

If the selected format is outside the six standard formats and the requested County Support option is not supported by the county, applicants and members should be referred to the DHCS Office of Civil Rights (OCR) at (916) 440-7370 to submit their request for review. Before a non-standard alternate format is approved, OCR will review whether to approve a requested non-standard alternate format would impose an undue burden to the county. If the requested format cannot be reasonably accommodated, OCR will notify the applicant or member and explain why the requested non-standard alternative format cannot be accommodated. This notification will be provided to the applicant or member in the format closest to the format requested. If a non-standard alternate format is approved OCR will communicate this to the county.

With the implementation of the CalSAWS alternate format functionality, counties will no longer submit a request to DHCS to convert documents for applicants and members to an alternate format. If the applicant/member has an alternate format preference, CalSAWS will submit a request to complete the alternate conversion and mailing.

Alternative Format Selection (AFS) Web Site

Beginning May 19, 2025, counties should discontinue use of the web-based system known as the Alternative Formats Selection (AFS) Screens (afs.dhcs.ca.gov) to track individuals who have indicated their alternate format preference for receiving information. Counties should instead use the CalSAWS AFS process to update Medi-Cal member's alternate format preferences. Counties will continue to receive the AFS weekly extract file through the SFTP folder to update member AFS preferences in CalSAWS until the AFS database is discontinued, which is anticipated in September 2025.

The MEDS database will store the most recent AFS selection from CalSAWS, CalHEERS, and other sources. If multiple AFS selections are submitted at the same

date and time from CalSAWS, CalHEERS, or other sources (Contractors, Managed Care plans, or Alternative Formats Selection Screens), then the AFS will be determined by the hierarchy below:

1. CalSAWS
2. CalHEERS
3. Other sources

Timeframes

Turnaround times for the vendor to convert documents to any of the six standard alternate formats will be 30 calendar days.

A member's benefits must not be reduced or terminated without timely and adequate notice explaining the reasons for the proposed action and the opportunity for a hearing. In the case of an individual with a visual impairment, adequate notice means notice in the individual's selected alternative format or notice that is otherwise in compliance with the ADA. Counties must not reduce, suspend, or terminate benefits without providing an adequate notice within applicable timeframes.

For **positive changes**: If an eligibility determination results in a positive change or there is no change to the eligibility, the County Eligibility Worker (CEW) should take the action and effectuate the change without delay. The CEW should not wait for the form or notice to be converted to the requested alternate format before taking action on the case.

For **negative changes**: In order to accommodate the timelines related to converting documents to the alternate format options, counties should maintain the member's eligibility until the adequate notice period expires after the issuance of the notice in the individual's requested alternate format.

Example #1: Date of Notice for Negative Action when action is taken before the 10-day cut off. ¹

- April 4, 2025 – CEW issues a notice of negative action. 30 calendar days would be added to accommodate for the alternate format conversion.
- May 4, 2025 - Alternative format notice is generated and mailed to the member.
- May 31, 2025 – Effective date of discontinuance or suspension.

¹ The NOA shall be mailed for an adverse action at least 10 calendar days prior to the first of the month in which an adverse action becomes effective, excluding the date of mailing. (42 CFR 431.211) (22 CCR 50179 (d) (1)) [ACWDL 13-13](#)

Example #2: Date of Notice for Negative Action when action is taken within the 10-day cut off.

- August 22, 2025 – CEW issues a notice of negative action. 30 calendar days would be added to accommodate for the alternate format conversion.
- September 21, 2025 - Alternative format notice is generated and mailed to the member.
- October 31, 2025 - Effective date of discontinuance or suspension is at the end of the following month.

Note: Additional months of eligibility due to the extension of benefits for Alternate Formats noticing purposes is not considered an error for quality control or performance review purposes.

Individuals can also request materials in alternate formats during the application process. The county should approve or deny Medi-Cal eligibility without delay and should not wait for the NOA to be converted in order to take action.

If you have questions on the Alternate Formats process, please contact Jack Montes at (916) 345-7854 or by email at Jack.montes@dhcs.ca.gov.

Original Signed By:

Sarah Crow
Medi-Cal Eligibility Division Chief