



JENNIFER KENT
DIRECTOR

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



EDMUND G. BROWN JR.
GOVERNOR

DATE: October 27, 2017

ALL PLAN LETTER 17-018
SUPERSEDES ALL PLAN LETTER 13-021

TO: ALL MEDI-CAL MANAGED CARE HEALTH PLANS

SUBJECT: MEDI-CAL MANAGED CARE HEALTH PLAN RESPONSIBILITIES FOR
OUTPATIENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this All Plan Letter (APL) is to explain the contractual responsibilities of Medi-Cal managed care health plans (MCPs) for the provision of medically necessary outpatient mental health services and the regulatory requirements for the Medicaid Mental Health Parity Final Rule (CMS-2333-F). MCPs must provide specified services to adults diagnosed with a mental health disorder, as defined by the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), that results in mild to moderate distress or impairment¹ of mental, emotional, or behavioral functioning. MCPs must also provide medically necessary non-specialty mental health services² to children under the age of 21. This APL also delineates MCP responsibilities for referring to, and coordinating with, county Mental Health Plans (MHPs) for the delivery of specialty mental health services (SMHS).

This letter supersedes APL 13-021 and provides updates to the responsibilities of the MCPs for providing mental health services. Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services (MHSUDS) Information Notice 16-061³ describes existing requirements regarding the provision of SMHS by MHPs, which have not changed as a result of coverage of non-specialty, outpatient mental health services by MCPs and the fee-for-service (FFS) Medi-Cal program. The requirements outlined in Information Notice 16-061 remain in effect.

¹ DHCS recognizes that the medical necessity criteria for impairment and intervention for Medi-Cal SMHS differ between children and adults. For children and youth, under EPSDT, the "impairment" criteria component of SMHS, medical necessity is less stringent than it is for adults; therefore, children with low levels of impairment may meet medical necessity criteria SMHS (CCR, Title 9 Sections § 1830.205 and §1830.210).

² The term "non-specialty" in this context is used to differentiate the mental health services covered and provided by MCPs and the FFS Medi-Cal program from the SMHS covered and provided by MHPs. It is not intended to describe the providers of these services as non-specialist providers.

³ MHSUDS Information Notices are available at: <http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/formsandpubs/Pages/MHSUDS-Information-Notices.aspx>

BACKGROUND:

The federal Section 1915(b) Medi-Cal SMHS Waiver⁴ requires Medi-Cal beneficiaries needing SMHS to access these services through MHPs. To qualify for these services, beneficiaries must meet SMHS medical necessity criteria regarding diagnosis, impairment, and expectations for intervention, as specified below. Medical necessity criteria differ depending on whether the determination is for:

1. Inpatient services;
2. Outpatient services; or
3. Outpatient services (Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT)).

The medical necessity criteria for SMHS can be found in Title 9, California Code of Regulations (CCR), Sections (§) 1820.205 (inpatient)⁵; 1830.205 (outpatient)⁶; and 1830.210 (outpatient EPSDT)⁷.

DHCS recognizes that the medical necessity criteria for impairment and intervention for Medi-Cal SMHS differs between children and adults. For children and youth, under EPSDT, the “impairment” criteria component of SMHS medical necessity is less stringent than it is for adults, therefore children with low levels of impairment may meet medical necessity criteria for SMHS (Title 9, CCR, §1830.205 and §1830.210), whereas adults must have a significant level of impairment. To receive SMHS, Medi-Cal children and youth must have a covered diagnosis and meet the following criteria:

1. Have a condition that would not be responsive to physical health care based treatment; and
2. The services are necessary to correct or ameliorate a mental illness and condition discovered by a screening conducted by the MCP, the Child Health and Disability Prevention Program, or any qualified provider operating within the scope of his or her practice, as defined by state law regardless of whether or not that provider is a Medi-Cal provider.

Consistent with Title 9, CCR, §1830.205, an adult beneficiary must meet all of the following criteria to receive outpatient SMHS:

⁴ SHMS Waiver Information can be found at:

[http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Pages/1915\(b\)_Medi-cal_Specialty_Mental_Health_Waiver.aspx](http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Pages/1915(b)_Medi-cal_Specialty_Mental_Health_Waiver.aspx)

⁵ Medical necessity criteria for inpatient specialty mental health services ([Title 9, CCR, §1820.205](#)) are not described in detail in this APL, as this APL is primarily focused on outpatient mental health services.

⁶ [Title 9, CCR, §1830.205](#)

⁷ [Title 9, CCR, §1830.210](#)

1. The beneficiary has one or more diagnoses covered by Title 9, CCR, §1830.205(b)(1), whether or not additional diagnoses, not included in Title 9, CCR, §1830.205(b)(1) are also present.
2. The beneficiary must have at least one of the following impairments as a result of the covered mental health diagnosis:
 - a. A significant impairment in an important area of life functioning; or
 - b. A reasonable probability of significant deterioration in an important area of life functioning.
3. The proposed intervention is to address the impairment resulting from the covered diagnosis, with the expectation that the proposed intervention will significantly diminish the impairment, prevent significant deterioration in an important area of life functioning, In addition, the beneficiary's condition would not be responsive to physical health care based treatment.

Prior to January 1, 2014, adult MCP beneficiaries who had mental health conditions but did not meet the medical necessity criteria for SMHS had only limited access to outpatient mental health services, which were delivered by primary care providers (PCPs) or by referral to Medi-Cal FFS mental health providers. DHCS paid MCPs a capitated rate to provide those outpatient mental health services that were within the PCP's scope of practice (unless otherwise excluded by contract). Since January 1, 2014, DHCS adjusted MCP capitation payments to account for expanded outpatient mental health services.

DHCS requires MCPs to cover and pay for mental health services conducted by licensed mental health professionals (as specified in the Psychological Services Medi-Cal Provider Manual⁸) for MCP beneficiaries with potential mental health disorders, in accordance with Sections 29 and 30 of Senate Bill X1 1 of the First Extraordinary Session (Hernandez & Steinberg, Chapter 4, Statutes of 2013), which added §14132.03 and §14189 to the Welfare and Institutions Code. This requirement, which was in addition to the previously-existing requirement that PCPs offer mental health services within their scope of practice, remains in effect, along with the requirement to cover outpatient mental health services to adult beneficiaries with mild to moderate impairment of mental, emotional, or behavioral functioning (as assessed by a licensed mental health professional through the use of a Medi-Cal-approved clinical tool or set of tools agreed upon by both the MCP and MHP) resulting from a mental health disorder (as defined in the current DSM).

⁸ The Psychological Services Provider Manual can be found at:
http://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/publications/masters-mtp/part2/psychol_a07.doc

On March 30, 2016, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a final rule (CMS-2333-F) that applied certain requirements from the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110-343, enacted on October 3, 2008) to coverage offered by Medicaid Managed Care Organizations. This included the addition of Subpart K – Parity in Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Benefits to the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The general parity requirement (Title 42, CFR, §438.910(b)) stipulates that treatment limitations for mental health benefits may not be more restrictive than the predominant treatment limitations applied to medical or surgical benefits. This precludes any restrictions to a beneficiary's access to an initial mental health assessment. Therefore, MCPs shall not require prior authorization for an initial mental health assessment. DHCS recognizes that while many PCPs provide initial mental health assessments within their scope of practice, not all do. If a beneficiary's PCP cannot perform the mental health assessment because it is outside of their scope of practice, they may refer the beneficiary to the appropriate provider.

POLICY:

MCPs continue to be responsible for the delivery of non-SMHS for children under age 21 and outpatient mental health services for adult beneficiaries with mild to moderate impairment of mental, emotional, or behavioral functioning resulting from a mental health disorder, as defined by the current DSM. MCPs shall continue to deliver the outpatient mental health services specified in their Medi-Cal Managed Care contract and listed in Attachment 1 whether they are provided by PCPs within their scope of practice or through the MCP's provider network.

MCPs also continue to be responsible for the arrangement and payment of all medically necessary, Medi-Cal-covered physical health care services, not otherwise excluded by contract, for MCP beneficiaries who require SMHS. The eligibility and medical necessity criteria for SMHS provided by MHPs have not changed pursuant to this policy; SMHS continue to be available through MHPs.

MCPs must be in compliance with Mental Health Parity requirements on October 1, 2017, as required by Title 42, CFR, §438.930. MCPs shall also ensure direct access to an initial mental health assessment by a licensed mental health provider within the MCP's provider network. MCPs shall not require a referral from a PCP or prior authorization for an initial mental health assessment performed by a network mental health provider. MCPs shall notify beneficiaries of this policy, and MCPs informing materials must clearly state that referral and prior authorization are not required for a beneficiary to seek an initial mental health assessment from a network mental health provider. An MCP is required to cover the cost of an initial mental health assessment

completed by an out-of-network provider only if there are no in-network providers that can complete the necessary service.

If further services are needed that require authorization, MCPs are required to follow guidance developed for mental health parity, as follows:

MCPs must disclose the utilization management or utilization review policies and procedures that the MCP utilizes to DHCS, its contracting provider groups, or any delegated entity, uses to authorize, modify, or deny health care services via prior authorization, concurrent authorization or retrospective authorizations, under the benefits included in the MCP contract.

MCP policies and procedures must ensure that authorization determinations are based on the medical necessity of the requested health care service in a manner that is consistent with current evidence-based clinical practice guidelines. Such utilization management policies and procedures may also take into consideration the following:

- Service type
- Appropriate service usage
- Cost and effectiveness of service and service alternatives
- Contraindications to service and service alternatives
- Potential fraud, waste and abuse
- Patient and medical safety
- Other clinically relevant factors

The policies and procedures must be consistently applied to medical/surgical, mental health and substance use disorder benefits. The plan shall notify contracting health care providers of all services that require prior authorization, concurrent authorization or retrospective authorization and ensure that all contracting health care providers are aware of the procedures and timeframes necessary to obtain authorization for these services.

The disclosure requirements for MCPs include making utilization management criteria for medical necessity determinations for mental health and substance use disorder benefits available to beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries and providers upon request in accordance with Title 42, CFR §438.915(a). MCPs must also provide to beneficiaries, the reason for any denial for reimbursement or payment of services for mental health or substance use disorder benefits in accordance with Title 42, CFR, §438.915(b). In addition, all services must be provided in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.

MCP Responsibility for Outpatient Mental Health Services

Attachment 1 summarizes mental health services provided by MCPs and MHPs. MCPs must provide the services listed below when medically necessary and provided by PCPs or by licensed mental health professionals in the MCP provider network within their scope of practice:

1. Individual and group mental health evaluation and treatment (psychotherapy);
2. Psychological testing, when clinically indicated to evaluate a mental health condition;
3. Outpatient services for the purposes of monitoring drug therapy;
4. Outpatient laboratory, drugs, supplies, and supplements (excluding medications listed in Attachment 2); and,
5. Psychiatric consultation.

Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes that are covered can be found in the Psychological Services Medi-Cal Provider Manual (linked in footnote 8 above).

Laboratory testing may include tests to determine a baseline assessment before prescribing psychiatric medications or to monitor side effects from psychiatric medications. Supplies may include laboratory supplies. Supplements may include vitamins that are not specifically excluded in the Medi-Cal formulary and that are scientifically proven effective in the treatment of mental health disorders (although none are currently indicated for this purpose).

For mild to moderate mental health MCP covered services for adults, medically necessary services are defined as reasonable and necessary services to protect life, prevent significant illness or significant disability, or to alleviate severe pain through the diagnosis and treatment of disease, illness, or injury. These include services to:

1. Diagnose a mental health condition and determine a treatment plan;
2. Provide medically necessary treatment for mental health conditions (excluding couples and family counseling for relational problems) that result in mild or moderate impairment; and,
3. Refer adults to the county MHP for SMHS when a mental health diagnosis covered by the MHP results in significant impairment;

For beneficiaries under the age of 21, the MCP is responsible for providing medically necessary non-SMHS listed in Attachment 1 regardless of the severity of the impairment. The number of visits for mental health services is not limited as long as the MCP beneficiary meets medical necessity criteria.

At any time, beneficiaries can choose to seek and obtain a mental health assessment from a licensed mental health provider within the MCP's provider network. Each MCP is still obligated to ensure that a mental health screening of beneficiaries is conducted by network PCPs. Beneficiaries with positive screening results may be further assessed either by the PCP or by referral to a network mental health provider. The beneficiary may then be treated by the PCP within the PCP's scope of practice. When the condition is beyond the PCP's scope of practice, the PCP must refer the beneficiary to a mental health provider within the MCP network. For adults, the PCP or mental health provider must use a Medi-Cal-approved clinical tool or set of tools mutually agreed upon with the MHP to assess the beneficiary's disorder, level of impairment, and appropriate care needed. The clinical assessment tool or set of tools must be identified in the MOU between the MCP and MHP, as discussed in APL 13-018.

Pursuant to the EPSDT benefit, MCPs are required to provide and cover all medically necessary services. For adults, medically necessary services include all covered services that are reasonable and necessary to protect life, prevent significant illness or significant disability, or to alleviate severe pain through the diagnosis or treatment of disease, illness, or injury. For children under the age 21, MCPs must provide a broader range of medically necessary services that is expanded to include standards set forth under Title 22, CCR Sections 51340 and 51340.01 and "[s]uch other necessary health care, diagnostic services, treatment, and other measures described in [Title 42, United States Code (US Code), Section 1396d(a)] to correct or ameliorate defects and physical and mental illnesses and conditions discovered by the screening services, whether or not such services or items are covered under the state plan" (Title 42, US Code, Section 1396d(r)(5)). However for children under the age 21, MCPs are required to provide and cover all medically necessary service, except for SMHS listed in CCR, Title 9, Section 1810.247 for beneficiaries that meet the medical necessity criteria for SMHS as specified in to CCR, Title 9, Sections 1820.205, 1830.205, or 1830.210 that must be provided by a MHP.

If an MCP beneficiary with a mental health diagnosis is not eligible for MHP services because they do not meet the medical necessity criteria for SMHS, then the MCP is required to ensure the provision of outpatient mental health services as listed in the contract and Attachment 1 of this APL, or other appropriate services within the scope of the MCP's covered services.

Each MCP must ensure its network providers refer adult beneficiaries with significant impairment resulting from a covered mental health diagnosis to the county MHP. Also, when the adult MCP beneficiary has a significant impairment, but the diagnosis is uncertain, the MCP must ensure that the beneficiary is referred to the MHP for further assessment.

The MCPs must also cover outpatient laboratory tests, medications (excluding carved-out medications that are listed in the MCP's relevant Medi-Cal Provider Manual⁹), supplies, and supplements prescribed by the mental health providers in the MCP network, as well as by PCPs, to assess and treat mental health conditions. The MCP may require that mild to moderate mental health services to adults are provided through the MCP's provider network, subject to a medical necessity determination.

The MCP may contract with the MHP to provide these mental health services when the MCP covers payment for these services.

MCPs continue to be required to provide medical case management and cover and pay for all medically necessary Medi-Cal-covered physical health care services for an MCP beneficiary receiving SMHS. The MCP must coordinate care with the MHP. The MCP is responsible for the appropriate management of a beneficiary's mental and physical health care, which includes, but is not limited to, the coordination of all medically necessary, contractually required Medi-Cal-covered services, including mental health services, both within and outside the MCP's provider network.

MCPs are responsible for ensuring that their delegates comply with all applicable state and federal law and regulations, as well as other contract requirements and DHCS guidance, including applicable APLs and Duals Plan Letters. These requirements must be communicated by each MCP to all delegated entities and subcontractors.

If you have any questions regarding this APL, please contact your Contract Manager.

Sincerely,

Original signed by Nathan Nau

Nathan Nau, Chief
Managed Care Quality and Monitoring Division
Department of Health Care Services

Attachments

⁹ The provider manual for the Two Plan Model can be found at: http://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/publications/masters-mtp/part1/mcptwoplan_z01.doc
The provider manual for the Geographic Managed Care Model can be found at: http://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/publications/masters-mtp/part1/mcpgmc_z01.doc
The provider manual for the County Organized Health Systems can be found [here](#)
The provider manual for Imperial, San Benito, and Regional Models can be found at: http://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/publications/masters-mtp/part1/mcpimperial_z01.doc

Attachment 1

Mental Health Services Description Chart for Beneficiaries Enrolled in an MCP

DIMENSION	MCP	MHP ¹⁰ OUTPATIENT	MHP INPATIENT
ELIGIBILITY	<p style="text-align: center;">Mild to Moderate Impairment in Functioning</p> <p>A beneficiary is covered by the MCP for services if he or she is diagnosed with a mental health disorder, as defined by the current DSM¹¹, resulting in mild to moderate distress or impairment of mental, emotional, or behavioral functioning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At an initial health screening, a PCP may identify the need for a thorough mental health assessment and refer a beneficiary to a licensed mental health provider within the MCP’s network. The mental health provider can identify the mental health disorder and determine the level of impairment. • A beneficiary may seek and obtain a mental health assessment at any time directly from a licensed mental health provider within the MCP network without a referral from a PCP or prior authorization from the MCP. • The PCP or mental health provider should refer any beneficiary who meets medical necessity criteria 	<p style="text-align: center;">Significant Impairment in Functioning</p> <p>An adult beneficiary is eligible for services if he or she meets all of the following medical necessity criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has an included mental health diagnosis;¹² 2. Has a significant impairment in an important area of life function, or a reasonable probability of significant deterioration in an important area of life function; 3. The focus of the proposed treatment is to address the impairment(s), prevent significant deterioration in an important area of life functioning. 4. The expectation is that the proposed treatment will significantly diminish the impairment, prevent significant deterioration in an important area of life function, and 5. The condition would not be responsive to physical health care based treatment. <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Note: For beneficiaries under age 21, specialty mental health services must be provided for a range of impairment levels</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Emergency and Inpatient</p> <p>A beneficiary is eligible for services if he or she meets the following medical necessity criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An included diagnosis; 2. Cannot be safely treated at a lower level of care; 3. Requires inpatient hospital services due to one of the following which is the result of an included mental disorder: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Symptoms or behaviors which represent a current danger to self or others, or significant property destruction; b. Symptoms or behaviors which prevent the beneficiary from providing for, or utilizing, food, clothing, or shelter; c. Symptoms or behaviors which present a severe risk to the beneficiary’s physical health; d. Symptoms or behaviors which represent a recent, significant deterioration in ability to function; e. Psychiatric evaluation or treatment which can only be performed in an acute psychiatric inpatient setting or through urgent

¹⁰ SMHS provided by MHP

¹¹ Current policy is based on DSM IV and will be updated to DSM 5 in the future

¹² As specified in regulations Title 9, Section 1830.205 for adults and Section 1830.210 for those under age 21

DIMENSION	MCP	MHP ¹⁰ OUTPATIENT	MHP INPATIENT
ELIGIBILITY (continued)	<p>for SMHS to the MHP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a beneficiary's condition improves under SMHS and the mental health providers in the MCP and MHP coordinate care, the beneficiary may return to the MCP's network mental health provider. <p><i>Note: Conditions that the current DSM identifies as relational problems are not covered (e.g., couples counseling or family counseling.)</i></p>	<p><i>to correct or ameliorate a mental health condition or impairment.¹³</i></p>	<p>or emergency intervention provided in the community or clinic; and;</p> <p>f. Serious adverse reactions to medications, procedures or therapies requiring continued hospitalization.</p>
SERVICES	<p>Mental health services provided by licensed mental health care professionals (as defined in the Medi-Cal provider bulletin) acting within the scope of their license:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual and group mental health evaluation and treatment (psychotherapy) Psychological testing when clinically indicated to evaluate a mental health condition Outpatient services for the purposes of monitoring medication therapy Outpatient laboratory, medications, supplies, and supplements Psychiatric consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental Health Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment Plan development Therapy Rehabilitation Collateral Medication Support Services Day Treatment Intensive Day Rehabilitation Crisis Residential Treatment Adult Residential Treatment Crisis Intervention Crisis Stabilization Targeted Case Management Intensive Care Coordination Intensive Home Based Services Therapeutic Foster Care Therapeutic Behavioral Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acute psychiatric inpatient hospital services Psychiatric Health Facility Services Psychiatric Inpatient Hospital Professional Services if the beneficiary is in fee-for-service hospital

¹³ [Title 9, CCR, §1830.210](#)

Attachment 2

Drugs Excluded from MCP Coverage

The following psychiatric drugs are noncapitated except for HCP 170 (KP Cal, LLC):

Amantadine HCl	Olanzapine Fluoxetine HCl
Aripiprazole	Olanzapine Pamoate
Asenapine (Saphris)	Monohydrate (Zyprexa Relprevv)
Benzotropine Mesylate	Paliperidone (<u>oral and injectable</u>)
Brexpiprazole (Rexulti)	Perphenazine
Cariprazine	Phenelzine Sulfate
Chlorpromazine HCl	Pimavanserin
Clozapine	Pimozide
Fluphenazine Decanoate	Quetiapine
Fluphenazine HCl	Risperidone
Haloperidol	Risperidone Microspheres
Haloperidol Decanoate	Selegiline (transdermal only)
Haloperidol Lactate	Thioridazine HCl
Iloperidone (Fanapt)	Thiothixene
Isocarboxazid	Thiothixene HCl
Lithium Carbonate	Tranlycypromine Sulfate
Lithium Citrate	Trifluoperazine HCl
Loxapine Succinate	Trihexyphenidyl
Lurasidone Hydrochloride	Ziprasidone
Molindone HCl	Ziprasidone Mesylate
Olanzapine	

These drugs are listed in the Medi-Cal Provider Manual in the following link:
http://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/publications/masters-mtp/part1/mcpgmc_z01.doc