



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



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DIRECTOR

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**DATE:** January 17, 2019

ALL PLAN LETTER 19-001

**TO:** ALL MEDI-CAL MANAGED CARE HEALTH PLANS

**SUBJECT:** MEDI-CAL MANAGED CARE HEALTH PLAN GUIDANCE ON NETWORK PROVIDER STATUS

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this All Plan Letter (APL) is to provide guidance to Medi-Cal managed care health plans (MCPs) regarding how the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) evaluates Network Provider status in order to promote consistency between federal regulations, Medi-Cal managed care contracts, state law, APLs, and similar instructions. It is the general intention of DHCS to apply this policy related to Network Provider contracting requirements in a standardized manner, to the extent appropriate, across relevant contexts, including MCP Network Provider and Subcontractor agreements, provider directory reporting, network adequacy certification, and directed payments pursuant to Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 438.6(c).<sup>1</sup>

**BACKGROUND:**

In May 2016, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released the Final Rule in the Federal Register applicable to Medicaid managed care programs (Final Rule).<sup>2</sup> The Final Rule did not eliminate or weaken any of the existing requirements found in the current Medi-Cal managed care contract, but rather updated the managed care regulations to include new and expanded requirements for MCP Subcontractors and separately defined Network Providers.<sup>3</sup> In implementing the Final Rule, DHCS submitted contract amendments to CMS to bring its existing provisions related to “Subcontracts” into compliance with the new and more stringent federal requirements.<sup>4</sup> As of now, and consistent with historical practice and Title 22 of the California Code of

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<sup>1</sup> 42 CFR, Part 438 is available at: <https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=1e1bce051e31df7ab188a92eff8209bf&mc=true&node=pt42.4.438&rgn=div5>

<sup>2</sup> See Federal Register Volume 81, Issue 88 (May 6, 2016), available at: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-05-06/pdf/2016-09581.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See 42 CFR 438.2, “Definitions.”

<sup>4</sup> Note that references to contract provisions in this document reflect changes made by the 2017 Final Rule amendment (identified as Package 42, an updated version of which was shared with MCPs in January 2018). To date the amendment is pending approval by CMS, and is anticipated to be finalized with minimal changes.

Regulations (CCR) Section 53250,<sup>5</sup> DHCS is maintaining uniformity to the extent appropriate with respect to the requirements for all “Subcontracts,” regardless of whether the agreement is between an MCP and an entity defined as a “Subcontractor” or “Network Provider” under 42 CFR Section 438.2.<sup>6</sup>

While the guidance in this APL on how DHCS will evaluate compliance is prospective, many of these obligations were imposed as of July 1, 2017, in accordance with the Final Rule.

Additional guidance on what constitutes an eligible Network Provider for directed payment programs is set forth on the DHCS Directed Payments web page.<sup>7</sup>

## **POLICY:**

### **I. Required Characteristics of Network Providers**

Effective on or after July 1, 2019, a Network Provider, as defined in 42 CFR Section 438.2 and the Medi-Cal managed care contract in Exhibit E, Attachment 1, Definitions, must:

1. Have an executed written Network Provider Agreement with the MCP or a Subcontractor of the MCP that meets all the requirements set forth in Attachment A of to this APL;
2. Be enrolled in accordance with APL 17-019,<sup>8</sup> the Medi-Cal Managed Care Provider Enrollment Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document, or any subsequent APL or FAQ update on the topic, unless enrollment is not required as specified by DHCS;
3. Be reported on the MCP’s 274 file submitted to DHCS, for all applicable filings, in accordance with APL 16-019 or any subsequent APL on the topic and the most recent DHCS 274 Companion Guide; and

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<sup>5</sup> The CCR is searchable at: <https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Search/Index>

<sup>6</sup> The Medi-Cal managed care contract defines the term Subcontract to include both Subcontractors and Network Providers (as those terms are defined under 42 CFR Section 438.2), and all requirements listed in Paragraph B of Provision 14 of Exhibit A, Attachment 6 apply to Network Providers. A provider may maintain Network Provider status without an agreement directly with an MCP, if they are connected through a series of Subcontracts, so long as those Subcontracts also meet all applicable state and federal law and contract requirements as well as DHCS guidance, including all applicable APLs and Policy Letters (PLs), in particular, but not limited to, those requirements in Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14 and APL 17-004 (or any subsequent APL on the topic). That chain of Subcontracts may include an entity that is also a Network Provider, who, as a result of taking on an administrative function of contracting for care (and not providing that care itself), also meets the definition of a “Subcontractor.”

<sup>7</sup> The DHCS directed payment web page is available at:

<https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/Pages/DirectedPymts.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> APLs are available at: <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/formsandpubs/Pages/AllPlanLetters.aspx>

4. Be included on all network adequacy filings that occur within the effective dates of the written Network Provider Agreement, in accordance with APL 18-005, or any subsequent APL on the topic, following the execution of the agreement. This does not automatically require the provider to be listed on a provider directory, nor does it require the inclusion of a Network Provider on network adequacy filings if such inclusion would be inappropriate due to timing or other circumstances, as discussed in APL 18-005.

For contract/rating periods commencing on or after July 1, 2019, when DHCS references Network Providers in guidance, information, instruction, or communications, it will refer to providers who meet the criteria outlined in this APL, unless expressly noted otherwise. MCPs must use the guidance provided in this APL and the checklist provided in Attachment A to update current Network Provider Agreement boilerplates for compliance before submitting to DHCS for review and approval. Note that this APL, including its attachment, is not an exhaustive list of all MCP duties related to Network Providers, and it is not intended to alter or limit an MCP's statutory and/or contractual obligations, nor does it limit an MCP's oversight obligations. MCPs are responsible for complying with all applicable state and federal law and contract requirements as well as DHCS guidance, including all applicable APLs and PLs.

A provider that does not meet the criteria for a Network Provider shall not be reported on the 274 file or as part of the MCP's network adequacy filings.

## **II. Written Network Provider Agreement Requirements**

In order to ensure alignment with the DHCS criteria for Network Providers across applicable settings, all MCPs must ensure that their Network Provider Agreements comply with current and applicable Medi-Cal managed care contract requirements.

In accordance with the current Medi-Cal managed care contracts and 22 CCR Section 53250, all Network Provider Agreement boilerplates must be submitted to DHCS for review and approval before use. A checklist of the required elements for these agreements is included as Attachment A of this APL. Where an MCP's relationship with a Network Provider includes one or more sub-delegated entities or a hospital to hospital agreement, each Subcontractor agreement that links the MCP to the Network Provider must also comply with all applicable state and federal law and contract requirements as well as DHCS guidance, including all applicable APLs and PLs, in particular, but not limited to, those in Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14 and APL 17-004 (or any subsequent APL on the topic).

### **III. DHCS Review and Approval of Network Provider Agreement Boilerplate Compliance**

As stated above, MCPs are required to submit Network Provider Agreement boilerplates that have been updated in accordance with the requirements in this APL to DHCS for review and approval prior to use. MCPs are also responsible for complying with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations, contract requirements, and other DHCS guidance, including APLs and PLs, as they relate to Network Provider requirements and Network Provider Agreements.

MCPs will have 60 days from the release date of this APL to submit updated Network Provider Agreement boilerplates for hospital providers and 120 days from the release date of this APL to submit updated Network Provider Agreement boilerplates for non-hospital providers to their DHCS contract manager.

The timing for DHCS to review these Network Provider Agreement boilerplates will follow the current 60-day review timing requirements as outlined in the Medi-Cal managed care contract under Exhibit E, Attachment 3, Duties of the State, DHCS Approval Process.

If an MCP has a timing issue that would require a Network Provider Agreement boilerplate to be approved for use by DHCS sooner than the 60-day review period would allow, the MCP must notify its DHCS Contract Manager to arrange an alternate timing agreement.

### **IV. Directed Payment Impacts**

All MCPs must comply with the terms of all directed payments approved by CMS in accordance with 42 CFR Section 438.6(c), as documented in CMS-approved preprints, state law, and/or as implemented by DHCS through APL or other similar guidance. All such guidance is available at the DHCS Directed Payments web page. If a Network Provider Agreement does not meet the Network Provider criteria set forth in this APL and/or in DHCS guidance regarding directed payments, the services provided under that agreement will not be eligible for directed payments for rating periods commencing on or after July 1, 2019. For pooled directed payments where DHCS retrospectively calculates final payments based on the actual reported utilization of eligible services, MCPs must continue to provide supplemental encounter/service-level data, in a manner and at times specified by DHCS. This information will aid in identifying the subset of services provided under a Network Provider Agreement that meet the Network Provider criteria set forth in this APL and/or in DHCS guidance regarding directed payments.

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

ALL PLAN LETTER 19-001  
Page 5

If you have any questions regarding this APL, please contact your Managed Care Operations Division Contract Manager.

Sincerely,

Original signed by Nathan Nau

Nathan Nau, Chief  
Managed Care Quality and Monitoring Division

Attachment(s)