

NEWS RELEASE



CALIFORNIA SET TO BECOME FIRST STATE IN NATION TO EXPAND MEDICAID SERVICES FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS

SACRAMENTO – California today became the first state in the nation to offer a targeted set of Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California) services to youth and adults in state prisons, county jails, and youth correctional facilities for up to 90 days prior to release. Currently, Medi-Cal services are generally available only after release from incarceration. Through a federal Medicaid 1115 demonstration waiver, the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) will establish a coordinated community reentry process that will assist people leaving incarceration to connect to the physical and behavioral health services they need upon release.

“Californians who reenter the community following incarceration have significant physical and behavioral health needs and are at high-risk of injury and death, especially in the days and weeks immediately following their release,” said Jacey Cooper, California’s State Medicaid Director and DHCS Chief Deputy Director for Health Care Programs. “Our justice-involved initiative is a key part of the state’s plan to create a new standard for what person-centered and equity-focused care looks like for all Californians, including the currently and formerly incarcerated.”

“Today we take a step closer to realizing the promise of our vision of a Healthy California for All, where health equity is a true priority,” said Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary of the California Health & Human Services Agency. “Historically, Californians residing in prisons, jails, and juvenile detention facilities have gaps in their health care services and transition back into their communities with limited services and without a solid plan. Individuals living with HIV, hypertension, diabetes, epilepsy, cancer, schizophrenia, or addictions can now expect to have the support they need to more securely land on their feet when they leave, with the medications they need, the appointments they need, and the connection to services that are life sustaining and life-saving. Through this initiative, those leaving incarcerated settings will have access to services that make it less likely they go straight from an incarcerated setting to an emergency room or hospital. This initiative will have a lasting impact on individuals as they return to the community by providing stable and reliable access to the care they need. We extend our gratitude and thanks to our federal partners for their innovative spirit and collaborative partnership.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The goals of the waiver are to increase and continue Medi-Cal coverage; improve coordination and communication among correctional systems, Medicaid systems, and community-based providers; and provide appropriate health care interventions at earlier opportunities to reduce acute services utilization and adverse health outcomes, including, but not limited to, decompensation, suicide-related death, overdose, overdose-related death, and all-cause death.

Improving adverse health outcomes for incarcerated people is a critical health equity issue. People of color are disproportionately incarcerated, including for mental health- and substance use disorder-related offenses. Approximately 29 percent of the state's male prison population is Black, despite only making up 6 percent of the state's male population, and many have considerable health care needs.

More than one million adults and youth enter or are released from California prisons and jails annually, and at least 80 percent of these justice-involved individuals are eligible for Medi-Cal. Formerly incarcerated individuals are more likely to experience poor health outcomes and face disproportionately higher rates of physical and behavioral health diagnoses. They are also at higher risk for injury and death as a result of violence, overdose, and suicide compared to people who have never been incarcerated.

- Incarcerated individuals in California jails under active care for mental health issues rose by 63 percent over the last decade.
- Sixty-six percent of people in California jails and prisons have a moderate or high need for substance use disorder treatment.
- Overdose death rates are more than 100 times higher in the two weeks after release from incarceration than for the general population.

By providing pre-release and reentry services to individuals who are incarcerated, DHCS aims to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities. Pre-release services will be anchored in comprehensive care management and include physical and behavioral clinical consultation, lab and radiology, Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), community health worker services, and medications and durable medical equipment. For those eligible, a care manager will be assigned – either in the carceral setting or via telehealth – to establish a relationship with the individual, understand their health needs, coordinate vital services, and make a plan for community transition, including connecting the individual to a community-based care manager they can work with upon their release.

To help establish this ambitious initiative, DHCS has been working closely with its implementation partners, including the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, county jails and probation, county behavioral health and social services, Medi-Cal managed care plans, and community-based providers. DHCS expects pre-release services to go-live no sooner than April 2024. Correctional facilities will have the flexibility to determine their launch dates within a 24-month timeframe and will be subject to a DHCS readiness review process before they can launch.

Medi-Cal is making other important changes to support access to pre-release services and a seamless transition to the community, including making sure people have Medi-Cal coverage. Effective January 1, 2023, state statute (AB 133, Chapter 143, Statutes of 2021) directs all counties implementing Medi-Cal application processes in county jails and youth correctional facilities to “suspend” their status while an individual is in jail or prison, and easily “turn on” when they enter the community so they can access essential health care services upon release.

“The justice-involved initiative is part of California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal, our broader initiative to transform Medi-Cal. It will allow California to address the unique and considerable health care needs of justice-involved individuals. It will help to improve health outcomes, deliver care more efficiently, and advance health equity across California,” said Michelle Baass, DHCS Director.

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