

June 28, 2017

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Director Kent:

The Medi-Cal Children's Health Advisory Panel (MCHAP) is an independent, statewide advisory board, legislatively authorized to advise the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) on matters relevant to all children enrolled in Medi-Cal and their families, including, but not limited to, emerging trends in the care of children, quality measurements, communications between DHCS and Medi-Cal families, provider network issues and Medi-Cal enrollment issues.

MCHAP actively monitors the policy and financing for children's health coverage and conducts deep-dive discussions on topics relevant to children's health improvement. Over the past three years, MCHAP adopted a children's health dashboard report to track immunizations, dental care, and mental health services among others; conducted deep-dive sessions on oral health and behavioral health and developed recommendations to improve access and quality of care; and, offered recommendations and ongoing input to the expansion of Medi-Cal to undocumented children. The next exploration will focus on network adequacy for children's services and the ensuing adoption of standards in California implementing the federal "mega-rule" for managed care. Most recently, MCHAP conducted a review of the Congressional proposal to reauthorize and fund the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and forwards the comments and recommendations listed below. **MCHAP offers its full support to reauthorization and robust, ongoing funding for CHIP.**

Created specifically for children, CHIP's benefits and provider networks are designed to ensure children have access to child-appropriate services, providers, specialists, and facilities. CHIP was created in 1997 with bipartisan support in Congress to offer health coverage to children in families earning too much to qualify for Medicaid. The Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA) of 2009 strengthened the program and increased federal funding, added outreach and enrollment opportunities, mental health parity, and dental care. In 2010, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) extended CHIP funding through federal fiscal year 2015 and required states to maintain Medicaid and CHIP eligibility levels without cuts through 2019, but only funded it through 2015. In March 2015, funding for CHIP was extended for an additional two years, through September 30, 2017. To ensure that children do not lose ground, MCHAP strongly supports preserving, improving and fully funding CHIP.

California is proud of its track record of success in building a seamless continuum of coverage for low and moderate income families through multiple expansions and improvements to enrollment. Currently, 97 percent of California's children have access to health insurance and MCHAP is proud that California continues to take a strong stand to protect the significant progress we have made in covering children. Medi-Cal enrollment totals 5.7 million children and includes 54% of all California children. The return on investment from health insurance coverage includes improved academic achievement and a healthier future workforce.

Together, the Children's Health Insurance Program, the Affordable Care Act and Medi-Cal for Families form the policy and financing foundation for the almost-universal coverage California has achieved. Initially, CHIP operated as a separate program in California called the Healthy Families Program (HFP). During 2013, all children enrolled in HFP (750,000) were transitioned to the state's Medi-Cal program and enrolled in managed care. California also expanded eligibility for former foster youth and provided coverage for children with temporary immigration status. Through Covered California, families have access to a marketplace to shop for and compare insurance plans and get financial assistance or enroll in Medi-Cal, if they qualify.

The reauthorization and full funding for CHIP is an essential pillar to continued progress in improving health outcomes for children and to achieving the recommendations forwarded by MCHAP to date.

Acting on behalf of MCHAP, we strongly support continued financing of children's health insurance to low and moderate income families. CHIP reauthorization is urgent and significant and the need for a fully funded program cannot be overstated.

Thank you for your efforts to ensure the health and wellbeing of all California's children.

Sincerely yours,

Ellen Beck, MD
Chair, Medi-Cal Children's Health Advisory Panel

cc: California Congressional Delegation