



DATE: August 28, 2024

Medi-Cal Eligibility Division Information Letter

Letter No.: I 24-17

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS
ALL COUNTY MEDI-CAL PROGRAM SPECIALISTS/LIAISONS

SUBJECT: TWO-PHASED IMPLEMENTATION: AUTOMATIC ENROLLMENT OF SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME/STATE SUPPLEMENTAL PAYMENT (SSI/SSP) RECIPIENTS INTO THE QUALIFIED MEDICARE BENEFICIARY (QMB) PROGRAM
(REFERENCE ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTOR'S LETTER [24-01](#))

The purpose of this Medi-Cal Eligibility Division Information Letter (MEDIL) is to provide counties with information regarding the two-phased implementation of the automatic enrollment of Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/State Supplemental Payment (SSP) members into the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) program.

Background

On September 21, 2023, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a [Final Rule](#) to streamline the enrollment and eligibility determination processes for Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs). The Final Rule requires states to automatically enroll certain SSI/SSP recipients into the QMB program starting October 1, 2024.

Additionally, on October 10, 2023, Governor Newsom signed Senate Bill (SB) 311, which amended California Welfare and Institutions Code [§14005.11](#). SB 311 requires DHCS to enter a Medicare Part A buy-in agreement for eligible Medicare beneficiaries with CMS through a state plan amendment. The implementation date of this policy is January 1, 2025, or upon achieving system readiness, whichever date is later. Once California has entered a Medicare Part A buy-in agreement with CMS, all SSI/SSP recipients will automatically be enrolled into QMB as required by the Final Rule.

Implementation Plan

To comply with the CMS Final Rule and SB 311, DHCS will implement a two-phased approach for the automatic enrollment of SSI/SSP members into the QMB program:

Phase One Implementation Date: October 1, 2024

- DHCS will automatically enroll current SSI/SSP members who are **eligible for premium-free Medicare Part A** into the QMB program, as part of the CMS Final Rule. Only individuals who do not currently have QMB eligibility through the county will be automatically enrolled in the QMB program during Phase One.
 - During this phase, counties will continue to case manage the SSI QMB cases currently active in California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS).
 - From October 1, 2024, through December 31, 2024, counties will continue to follow existing policy for MSP-only applications and noticing requirements for SSI/SSP members that apply for an MSP per ACWDL [08-21](#).
 - In the rare instances when an SSI QMB is discontinued, DHCS will monitor all SSI QMB discontinuances and reinstate eligibility for any individuals who continue to meet the automatic enrollment criteria, including any county-managed cases, which will be restored as state-controlled cases.
- Thereafter, all newly eligible SSI/SSP eligible for premium-free Part A will be automatically enrolled into QMB as described in All County Welfare Directors Letter (ACWDL) [24-01](#).

For example, Mary Sue obtains SSI/SSP eligibility in October 2024 through the Social Security Administration (SSA), and she is eligible for premium-free Part A. Mary Sue may apply for QMB by submitting a MSP-only application to the county. If Mary Sue does not apply for QMB through the county, DHCS will automatically enroll Mary Sue into the QMB program. If DHCS enrolls Mary Sue into QMB, DHCS will send Mary Sue the required Notice of Action (NOA) informing her that she has been enrolled into the QMB program. QMB coverage for Mary Sue will begin November 2024.

Phase Two Implementation Date: January 1, 2025

- Subject to systems readiness, DHCS will automatically enroll **all** SSI/SSP eligible members into the QMB program in accordance with SB 311 and the CMS Final Rule during Phase 2.
- As outlined in ACWDL [24-01](#), counties are instructed to close any current QMB case records in the CalSAWS for SSI individuals. The process to close current QMB cases records for SSI individuals shall be automated through CalSAWS. These cases will be automatically transitioned to DHCS. Beginning January 1, 2025, DHCS will enroll the entire SSI/SSP population into the QMB program.

- Effective January 1, 2025, the county shall no longer grant QMB eligibility for SSI individuals in CalSAWS. If an SSI individual submits an application for QMB, the county should deny the application as aided on another case.

For example, John Doe obtains SSI/SSP eligibility in January 2025 through the SSA. DHCS will automatically enroll John Doe into the QMB program. DHCS will send John Doe the required NOA informing him that he has been enrolled into the QMB program. QMB coverage for John Doe will begin February 2025.

DHCS Responsibilities

DHCS will automatically assign the QMB aide code (80) in MEDS to individuals enrolled in the SSI program in addition to their primary MEDS aid codes (10, 20, or 60), as outlined in ACWDL [24-01](#) starting October 1, 2024. DHCS will monitor this population to ensure that eligibility continues for members that continue to meet the eligibility criteria for SSI.

DHCS will send a Notice of Action (NOA) to SSI/SSP members upon enrollment into the QMB program.

DHCS maintains and shall continue to update an informational webpage for the MSPs at <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/MSPCal>.

County Responsibilities

Counties are responsible for assisting members with general questions related to Medi-Cal or the MSPs. They will continue to case manage other benefit programs, such as CalFresh for SSI members and applicants seeking additional benefits and services.

Counties shall continue to:

- Case manage non-SSI QMB cases.
- Assist members with requests to replace their Benefits Identification Cards (BIC) to ensure continuous access to healthcare services.
- Provide members with appropriate contact information for the Social Security Administration (SSA) for questions related to their SSI benefits.

For non-SSI/SSP QMB members, counties will continue receive MEDS alerts if a buy-in issue occurs. If the county is unable to correct the issue, the county shall continue to submit a Problem Report to the Third-Party Liability and Recovery Division (TPLRD) as outlined in MEPM [15F-17](#) for Medicare Part A buy-in related issues for non-SSI/SSP

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QMB members. ACWDL [20-26](#) provides the current process for submitting a State Medicare Buy-In Problem Report.

SSI/SSP members who are automatically enrolled into the QMB program by DHCS will receive a Notice of Action (NOA) with contact information to address QMB related questions. The finalized NOA is enclosed in this MEDIL.

If you have any questions, or if we can provide further information, please contact Michael Allen, by phone at (916) 345-7554 or by email at Michael.Allen@dhcs.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Sarah Crow, Chief
Medi-Cal Eligibility Division

Enclosure



You get financial help paying your out-of-pocket Medicare costs!

Dear <Medi-Cal member>,

You will be enrolled in the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) program starting <mm/dd/yyyy>. You get the QMB program because you have Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and are in Medi-Cal.

The QMB program pays your Medicare Part A and Part B premiums, co-insurance, co-payments, and deductibles. When you are in the QMB program, doctors, hospitals, and other providers cannot bill you for these costs. To learn more about QMB, go to <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/MSPCal>.

QMB starts the first month after you qualify for SSI benefits. You do not have to do anything to join the QMB program. Each time you get care, show both your Medicare card and your Medi-Cal card (also called a Benefits Identification Card (BIC). This tells your provider you are in the QMB program.

You must report changes in your living situation, marital status, and resources to the Social Security Administration (SSA). Report any changes no later than 10 days after the end of the month when the change happened.

You can report your changes:

- Online: <https://www.ssa.gov/>
- By phone toll free at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778)
- By mail to your local Social Security office or drop off your information in person

Questions?

For questions about SSI, go to your local Social Security Office or call 1-800-772-1213.

For billing questions and questions about your claims, medical records, or expenses, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).

For questions about QMB, call the Medi-Cal Helpline at 1-800-541-5555.

For free one-on-one Medicare counseling, call the Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) at 1-800-434-0222.

Based on California Code of Regulations, Title 22, sections 50179 and 50258.