

DATE: XX XX, 2026

Behavioral Health Information Notice No: 26-0XX

TO: California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California Association for Alcohol/Drug Educators
California Association of Alcohol & Drug Program Executives, Inc.
California Association of DUI Treatment Program
California Association of Mental Health Peer Run Organizations
California Association of Social Rehabilitation Agencies
California Consortium of Addiction Programs and Professional
California Behavioral Health Association
California Hospital Association
California Opioid Maintenance Providers
California State Association of Counties
Coalition of Alcohol and Drug Associations
County Behavioral Health Directors
County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California
County Drug & Alcohol Administrators

SUBJECT: Responsibility to Pay for Psychiatric Emergency Services

PURPOSE: This Behavioral Health Information Notice (BHIN) clarifies that Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans (MCPs) are responsible for covering and reimbursing providers for emergency services and care (inclusive of psychiatric emergencies) and any post stabilization care services.¹

REFERENCE: [BHIN 22-011](#); Assembly Bill (AB) 1316; [All Plan Letter \(APL\) 26-002](#)

¹ (W&I) Code section 14132.025

BACKGROUND:

BHIN 22-011 provides guidance and clarification regarding the No Wrong Door for Mental Health Services policy. The No Wrong Door policy supports timely access to mental health services without delay regardless of the delivery system where a Medi-Cal member seeks care and enables members to maintain treatment relationships with trusted providers without interruption. BHIN 22-011 also clarifies that MCPs must cover and pay for emergency room professional services and facility charges resulting from an emergency room visit for psychiatric emergencies.²

Assembly Bill (AB) 1316 (Statutes 2024, Chapter 632) added W&I Code §14132.025, which codified MCP responsibilities to cover emergency services and care and any post stabilization care services.³

POLICY:

In accordance with W&I Code §14132.025, and consistent with the Medi-Cal Managed Care Contract and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with Behavioral Health Plans (BHPs), MCPs are responsible for the coverage and payment of emergency services and care and post-stabilization care services, excluding any Medi-Cal Specialty Mental Health Services provided once an enrolled member is admitted for inpatient psychiatric care.⁴

Emergency services and care means medical screening, examination, and evaluation by a physician and surgeon, or, to the extent permitted by applicable law, by other appropriate licensed persons under the supervision of a physician and surgeon, to determine if an emergency medical condition or active labor exists and, if it does, the care, treatment, and surgery, if within the scope of that person's license, necessary to relieve or eliminate the emergency medical condition, within the capability of the facility.⁵

² BHIN 22-011

³ Welf. & Inst. Code, § 14132.025, subds. (a)-(b).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Emergency services and care also means an additional screening, examination, and evaluation by a physician, or other personnel to the extent permitted by applicable law and within the scope of their licensure and clinical privileges, to determine if a psychiatric emergency medical condition exists, and the care and treatment necessary to relieve or eliminate the psychiatric emergency medical condition, within the capability of the facility.⁶

Emergency services and care include emergency room professional services and facility charges for emergency room visits.⁷

For a member with a psychiatric emergency medical condition, as defined in subdivision (a) of [Section 1317.1\(k\)\(1\)](#) of the Health and Safety Code, emergency services and care necessary to relieve or eliminate that condition are covered, regardless of whether the beneficiary is voluntary, or involuntarily detained for assessment, evaluation, and crisis intervention, or placement for evaluation and treatment pursuant to the Lanterman-Petris-Short Act (Part 1 (commencing with [Section 5000](#)) of Division 5 of the Welfare and Institutions Code).⁸

For any members who are not enrolled in a MCP, Medi-Cal Fee-For-Service is the payer for emergency services and care, inclusive of psychiatric emergencies, excluding any Medi-Cal Specialty Mental Health Services provided once an enrolled member is admitted for inpatient psychiatric care.⁹

COMPLIANCE MONITORING:

Medi-Cal BHPs are responsible for conducting ongoing monitoring of their contracted providers to ensure compliance with the terms of the BHP's contract with DHCS, including policies outlined in this BHIN. DHCS monitors and oversees Medi-Cal BHPs and their operations as required by state and federal law. DHCS will monitor Medi-Cal BHPs for compliance with the requirements outlined above, and deviations from the requirements may require corrective action plans or other applicable remedies. This oversight may include, but is not limited to, verifying that services provided to Medi-Cal

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

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members are medically necessary, and that documentation complies with the applicable state and federal laws, regulations, and the MHP contract.

Please direct any questions to Medi-Cal Behavioral Health – County Support at CountySupport@dhcs.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Ivan Bhardwaj, Chief

Medi-Cal Behavioral Health Policy Division

DRAFT