

DATE: November 5, 2025

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS Letter No.:25-23
ALL COUNTY WELFARE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS
ALL COUNTY MEDI-CAL PROGRAM SPECIALISTS/LIAISONS
ALL COUNTY HEALTH EXECUTIVES
ALL COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH DIRECTORS
ALL COUNTY MEDS LIAISONS

SUBJECT: RESUMPTION OF MEDICAL SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT
REQUIREMENTS FOR MEDI-CAL (REFERENCES: MEDI-CAL
ELIGIBILITY DIVISION LETTER [MEDIL I 23-44](#); ALL COUNTY
WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER No. [ACWDL 20-04](#); [ACWDL 25-09](#))

The purpose of this All County Welfare Directors Letter (ACWDL) is to provide counties with updated guidance on the administration of Medical Support Enforcement (MSE) requirements. This ACWDL clarifies existing policy and provides notice of the resumption of MSE requirements for Medi-Cal programs effective July 1, 2025.

The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) is providing additional guidance necessary to consolidate policy expectations in accordance with ACWDL 20-04, clarify county responsibilities, and to address frequently asked questions. This ACWDL is designed to promote consistent understanding and application of MSE policy and procedures after conditional Medi-Cal eligibility is granted.

Background

Federal law and regulations require beneficiaries to cooperate with MSE. Medical support is a form of child support that provides either health care coverage or cash medical support. MSE is designed to ensure children in absent-parent households receive necessary medical support without interruption of Medi-Cal coverage.

MSE Policy

Under Section 1912 of the Social Security Act and federal Medicaid rules, individuals applying for Medicaid (Medi-Cal) who have legal capacity to assign support rights must:

- Assign their rights to medical support and payments to the state.
- Cooperate in establishing paternity, securing medical support, and providing relevant information to assist in enforcement efforts.

If the parent, guardian, or relative caretaker fails to comply without good cause, they may lose eligibility. However, the child's eligibility will not be affected by their noncooperation.

On September 14, 2023, DHCS received a waiver from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to suspend the requirement to cooperate with MSE as a temporary flexibility to support Medi-Cal members during the continuous coverage unwinding period. The waiver flexibilities were sunsetted, pursuant to ACWDL 25-09. Effective July 1, 2025, the counties must apply MSE at application and renewal when they identify there is an absent parent.

MSE Application

MSE applies to custodial parents and caretaker relatives responsible for their children's health, particularly those receiving or applying for public benefits. Either parent can enroll in Medi-Cal services or open a child support services case, as can a child's legal guardian. Generally, any adult parent who applies for Medi-Cal on behalf of themselves and their children must assign medical support and payment rights to the State and cooperate as a condition of eligibility.

The CEW must use the CW 2.1 NA form to obtain information about child, spousal, and medical support assignment and cooperation rules. CW 2.1 forms and referrals to child support must be initiated after enrollment.

MSE is a post-eligibility requirement; therefore, the CEW must not delay enrollment while initiating the request for proof of compliance with MSE requirement if all other necessary information and verifications have been provided. When there is already a Local Child Support Agency (LCSA) case open, and the absent parent is providing Other Health Coverage (OHC), the CEW may document that finding in the case record, indicating the custodial parent is cooperating and approve the custodial parent's eligibility in place of the CW 2.1 Q.

MSE Renewal

CW 2.1 forms are not required at each renewal if the information has been completed previously, there have been no changes, and the customer is complying.

- The beneficiary may respond to the county via the internet, by mail, by telephone, in person, or through other commonly available electronic means if those means are available in that county.
- Parents, guardians or caretaker relatives must cooperate unless exempted for good cause.

- Good cause must be reviewed at each renewal.

MSE Good Cause

Counties are responsible for determining initial and continuing eligibility. Good cause exemptions are for the purpose of ensuring safety and avoiding hardship. Good cause is established in accordance with Title 22, CCR 50771.5. The CEW must grant good cause for noncooperation with MSE rules if the individual can establish that:

- Cooperation with MSE is anticipated to result in physical, sexual, or emotional harm to the child.
- Cooperation with MSE is anticipated to result in abuse to the parent or caretaker with whom the child is living.
- The child conceived was a result of incest or rape.
- Legal proceedings for adoption of the child are pending.
- The parent/guardian is being assisted in determining whether to keep or relinquish the child for adoption, and discussions have not exceeded 3 months.
- There is good faith cooperation, but the applicant is unable to identify or assist in locating the absent parent; or
- Any other reason that would make efforts to establish paternity or establish, modify, or enforce a support obligation is contrary to the best interest of the child.

MSE Non-compliance Requirements

When a county determines that an individual is ineligible for Medi-Cal due to Non-compliance, the applicant can withdraw the application, claim good cause, or become an ineligible member of the Medi-Cal Family Budget Unit (MFBU), but the child(ren) is not denied or discontinued from Medi-Cal for noncooperation. The assignment of medical support rights for the child(ren) in this scenario must not be uploaded to CalSAWS, resulting in a referral to the LCSA.

EXAMPLE: Mother and father have one child together (a) and mother has another child (b) with a different father. The family applies for Medi-Cal for the family. The family must cooperate with MSE because they are applying for Medi-Cal for child (b) and the mother is legally responsible for child (b). If mother does not cooperate, she is to be denied Medi-Cal, discontinued, or made an ineligible member of the MFBU. Two children and the father may be granted Medi-Cal if otherwise eligible.

MSE Clarifications and Scenarios

To support consistent county implementation and accurate case processing, the following examples illustrate how MSE policy should be applied in various eligibility situations. These scenarios address common county questions and are intended to assist CEWs in interpreting MSE requirements in alignment with federal and state guidance.

Child Only Medi-Cal Case with Absent Parent

Scenario I: A grandmother applies for Medi-Cal on behalf of her grandchild. The child's parents are not in the household.

Clarification I: This is considered a child-only case. MSE rules do not apply to the grandmother because she is not applying for Medi-Cal. Counties must not delay or request absent parent information for child-only cases.

Scenario II: A grandmother applies for Medi-Cal on behalf of herself and her grandchild. The child's parents are not in the household.

Clarification II: This is considered a child-parent caretaker relative case. MSE rules apply to the grandmother because she is also requesting a Medi-Cal determination for herself.

Unmarried Parents Living Together

Scenario: Two unmarried parents live together with their child, and both apply for Medi-Cal.

Clarification: MSE rules apply to both parents. The parents are required to complete a Voluntary Declaration of Parentage (VDOP). Once the signed VDOP is complete, no referral to the LCSA is required.

Establishing "Legal Parentage" for unmarried parents is easy and free. Counties are required to assist individuals in establishing eligibility. When a birth parent and other parent are not married, the birth parent and other parent must complete a Voluntary Declaration of Parentage (VDOP) or get a court order before the other parent's name can be added to the birth certificate.

EXAMPLE: The CEW must review household composition at the time of application. Child-only cases do not require paternity establishment because MSE rules apply to the custodial parent caretaker relative only. Unmarried couples applying for or receiving

Medi-Cal on behalf of a child must provide paternity evidence when the child is born to unmarried parents. Paternity evidence includes court orders, voluntary declarations, or birth certificates with an acknowledgment VDOP. For unmarried couples residing together the CEW will obtain a copy of the child's birth certificate, which includes a signed VDOP. If the birth certificate does not include a VDOP a referral to the Parental Opportunity Program (POP) is required.

Pregnant Individual Applying for Medi-Cal

Scenario: An individual applies for Medi-Cal while pregnant and is not married. The father is not in the home.

Clarification: Pregnant individuals are exempt from MSE requirements during pregnancy and up to 12 months postpartum. CW 2.1 forms and MSE referrals must not be requested or initiated during this exemption period. MSE applies once the postpartum period concludes and the individual remains eligible.

Unable to Identify Absent Parent

Scenario: A mother applies for Medi-Cal for both herself and her child. The mother indicates on the CW 2.1 NA that she agrees to cooperate with MSE. The mother returns the CW 2.1 Q form to the county incomplete because she cannot identify the absent parent or provide sufficient information to complete the form.

Clarification: The CEW must send the CW 51 to gather all known information from the applicant to determine whether or not the mother has made a good faith effort and qualifies for a good cause exemption from providing MSE. If the mother has provided all available details and is unable to identify or locate the absent parent, MSE should be considered compliant, and eligibility should not be delayed.

CalWORKs Sanctions and Medi-Cal

Scenario: A household applies for both CalWORKs and Medi-Cal. The parent is sanctioned by CalWORKs for MSE noncooperation reasons.

Clarification: Medi-Cal eligibility must not be denied for the child. If the custodial parent or caretaker refuses to cooperate in MSE, this individual is ineligible for Medi-Cal benefits.

Renewal with No Reported Changes

Scenario: A family completes their annual Medi-Cal renewal and reports no household or absent parent changes since the last review.

Clarification: CW 2.1 forms are not required again if all MSE information remains current and the family continues to cooperate. CEWs may document “no change” in CalSAWS and proceed with the renewal.

Parent Applying for Children with Different Fathers

Scenario: A mother applies for Medi-Cal for two children, each with a different father. One father resides in the home; the other is absent.

Clarification: MSE rules apply only to the mother. The CEW will send out the CW 2.1 NA. Upon completion of the Notice and Agreement form, the CEW will send out the appropriate MSE form for completion (CW 2.1 Q or CW 51). No information is needed for the child whose parent is present in the home as long as paternity has been established.

Refusal to Cooperate Without Good Cause

Scenario: A parent refuses to provide absent parent information and does not claim good cause.

Clarification: The county must record non-cooperation in CalSAWS and discontinue the adult’s eligibility. The child’s Medi-Cal eligibility remains unaffected. The CEW must document the action and provide appropriate notice to the household.

Child Support Updates and Information from California Child Support Automate System (CCSAS)

Scenario: The county learns that child support information and updates are shared with the county via CalSAWS.

Clarification: Information and updates received from CCSAS must be evaluated for both Medical Support and Change in Circumstances purposes.

If you have any questions, or if we can provide further information, please submit your inquiry using the Request for Policy Interpretation Form and send it, along with any supporting documentation, to MCED-Policy@dhcs.ca.gov.

Letter No.:25-23
Page 7
November 5, 2025

Sincerely,

Sarah Crow, Chief
Medi-Cal Eligibility Division