MEETING SUMMARY

MEDI-CAL MEMBER ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MMAC) MEETING SUMMARY

Date:	Wednesday, February 12, 2025
Time:	5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Type of Meeting:	Virtual
Members Present:	13 of 16 members were present
DHCS Staff Present:	Michelle Baass, Director; Lindy Harrington, Assistant State Medicaid Director; Paula Wilhelm, Director for DHCS Behavioral Health; Tracy Arnold, Assistant Director; Anastasia Dodson, Deputy Director, Office of Medicare Innovation and Integration; Krissi Khokhobashvili, Deputy Director, Office of Communications; Hatzune Aguilar, Stakeholder and Community Engagement Manager; Maria Romero-Mora, Community Engagement; Brian Hansen, Policy Advisor to the Directorate; Ken Blodgett, User Experience Designer; Mitchell Weiner, Digital Media Manager; Marjan Zamanian, Web Team Manager; Isabel Flores, Stakeholder Engagement and Outreach Analyst; Eduardo Lozano, Stakeholder Engagement and Outreach Analyst.
Meeting Materials:	Meeting Presentation

Introduction and Summary of Content

» Members were introduced to DHCS' Office of Communication Deputy Director Krissi Khokhobashvili and informed about the new Medi-Cal member website to enroll and re-enroll in coverage.

» A 30-minute breakout room discussion was held after the website review for members to discuss three questions: What was your experience completing the tasks using the website? Is there anything missing from the website? What new features would be helpful to add to the website in the future?

![DHCS logo]

»   Members then returned to the main room for a group discussion and to provide comments, followed by next steps and closing remarks.

Topics Discussed

Introduction to DHCS Leadership: Krissi shared her background and passion for clear, accessible health care communication. With a decade of experience in media relations and stakeholder engagement at the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, she brings expertise to the role. Growing up on Medicaid in Montana, she has a personal connection to DHCS' mission and is committed to ensuring members understand their rights. Her role is to oversee key communication initiatives, including stakeholder engagement, media relations, and digital media.

New Medi-Cal Website to Enroll and Reenroll: DHCS' web team is creating a user-friendly website for Medi-Cal members. As user-experience designers, they emphasized simplifying complex processes and highlighted the team's efforts. They shared that the current DHCS website is confusing and presented the new site as a streamlined, dedicated resource focused on clear, easy-to-understand information. The site prioritizes simplicity, breaking down key topics like eligibility, benefits, and coverage maintenance. In a live demonstration, the team showcased features, such as a breakdown of benefits by audience, an interactive eligibility estimator, and an improved county office locator. Optimized for mobile, the site aims to enhance accessibility and improve the user experience.

All three breakout rooms addressed the following three questions and responses:

Key questions discussed

1. What was your experience completing the tasks using the website?
2. Is there anything missing from this website?
3. What new features would be helpful to add to the website in the future?

Member Responses

»   Members struggled with finding key information, such as vaccine details and renewals, while language barriers and search functionality posed challenges for less tech-savvy users. Immunization information was categorized clearly for some users, but confusing for others due to inconsistent terminology.

»   Eligibility determination was generally straightforward, though clearer income guidelines and better screen reader compatibility were suggested. While the Medi-Cal sign-up link was easy to locate, account creation was seen as a barrier.

Members suggested revising terminology and integrating AI for better navigation. Renewal and local office searches were simple

» Members struggled to find benefit start dates when trying to connect to a third-party portal.

» Members found that determining Medi-Cal eligibility was easy, though some sought clearer guidelines for multi-family households. Finding the sign-up link was simple, but concerns were raised about broadband access and stigma in certain communities, and older adults had trouble with creating an account.

» Members suggested making preventive care more prominent.

» The renewal information was seen as much improved, though concern was raised about state and county-level eligibility determinations causing potential confusion. Reenrollment due dates were easy for some, but more complex for members with disability exemptions.

» Searching for a local Medi-Cal local office was straightforward. The development team addressed concerns about website and mobile app consistency and confirmed plans to enhance navigation and user experience.

» A member suggested adding a section explaining why people should enroll in Medi-Cal, including personal stories to encourage participation.

» Another member felt the website was well-organized and covered essential information but wondered about language accessibility.

» They also recommended adding a note about required documents and estimated application time to help users with the application process. It was suggested that this information be placed after the qualification widget. There were no concerns about the yellow figures used on the site.

» Members shared suggestions for improving the website and pointed out that disability-related information is only found under the "elderly" tab, which could be confusing for users who might not know where to look. Other members suggested adding more accessibility features, such as prompts to assist users who may be deaf or visually impaired and lack immediate support. The facilitator assured them that accessibility is a priority, including screen reader compatibility. One member emphasized the need for an update section on the website to notify users of any changes, as navigating a website after modifications can be frustrating without clear guidance.

» Members discussed potential new features for the website, with a focus on making the enrollment process easier and more transparent. When asked about their initial experience signing up for Medi-Cal, a member shared that they initially applied in person and found the process tedious due to repeated document submissions. This member found the website more functional and efficient, eliminating confusion and providing a clear record of submissions. Another member raised concerns about first-time applicants, particularly those with immigration status considerations. As a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient, they recalled difficulties in the application process when they were asked for their citizenship status despite selecting "Other." This member suggested adding a tool that would guide applicants based on their immigration status, specifying required documents and tracking submissions to prevent repeated requests.

» The session concluded with recommendations for clearer communication, improved terminology, and features like chat support and a FAQ section, with the development team acknowledging feedback and planning future improvements.

Reporting Out

» Accessibility Improvements: Members emphasized the need for accessibility improvements, including larger font sizes for visually impaired users. They highlighted the importance of improving screen reader compatibility, particularly with Job Access With Speech (JAWS), and suggested consulting with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DOR) for best practices, like talk-to-text features. Additionally, they recommended creating a dedicated disability services tab to distinguish it from older adult care resources.

» Prominent translation options for non-English speakers. One example that members mentioned was having a non-English translation button so members who do not speak English know where to find it.

» User Support and Navigation: Members recommended enhancing user support and navigation by adding a chatbot with AI-driven search prompts and live agent assistance.

» They also suggested placing FAQs on the main page for easier access and providing clearer guidance on immigration and document status tracking.

» Application Process and Clarity: Members suggested clarifying the next steps after applying and qualifying for Medi-Cal, including required documents and

timelines, and providing guidance on including multi-family households in applications.

» Reducing Stigma and Improving Communication: Members recommend adding content on Medi-Cal benefits, including personal stories, to help reduce stigma and improve communication.

» Website and Mobile App Consistency: Members expressed the need for consistency between the website and mobile app and suggested adding an updates page to keep users informed of site changes.

Group Discussion

Key questions discussed:

1. How likely are you to recommend the new Medi-Cal website to others? Please share a number from 1 (not likely) to 10 (very likely).
2. Why did you give that answer?

Member Responses:

» Members rated the likelihood of recommending the new Medi-Cal website on a scale from 1 to 10 and explained their reasoning. Several participants rated the website highly (9 or 10), praising its user-friendly interface, accessibility, and ease of updating information. One member appreciated its simplicity but suggested adding a timeframe for processes and improving language accessibility. Another member liked how the site lists local offices by ZIP codes. On the other hand, another member noted that there are discrepancies with providing offices further out from the zip codes entered and not closer county offices to their homes, knowing there are closer county offices. Members found the new format more efficient for information purposes. Note: the new website tested by MMAC members is not intended to submit documents.

» Some members rated the new website lower due to concerns about inclusivity. Another member gave it a 5, emphasizing the lack of a tool for immigrants to check eligibility based on status. One member rated it a 6, noting that the site does not do enough to encourage people to use Medi-Cal and suggested outreach efforts, including pamphlets in health care centers for website visibility. Another member also rated it a 6 and stressed the need for better translation, particularly in Chinese, and clearer communication about public charge concerns for immigrants. Other challenges mentioned included accessibility for visually impaired users, as highlighted by a member who struggled with navigation due

to software updates affecting assistive technology. A member suggested clarifying the difference between Covered California and Medi-Cal and improving accommodations for older adults and disabled users.

» Overall, the discussion highlighted that while the website is well-designed and easy to use, improvements are needed in areas, such as immigration eligibility tools, translation quality, accessibility, and public outreach, to make it more inclusive and effective for all users.

Member Comments

Following the large group discussion, members provided open comments and shared common themes. The discussion highlights are below.

Discussion

» Mental Health Awareness and Accessibility: Raising awareness about mental health is essential, and one way to support this is by prominently featuring mental health services on the front page of the website, making resources easily accessible. Highlighting these services ensures that individuals seeking help can quickly find the support they need without unnecessary barriers. Additionally, emphasizing therapy as an integral part of overall wellness reinforces the idea that mental health is just as important as physical health. By normalizing conversations around mental well-being, DHCS can foster a more supportive and inclusive environment for all.

» Highlighting Key Medi-Cal Benefits: Medi-Cal offers essential benefits, and it is important to make major services like dental and vision care more visible to ensure people are aware of their coverage. A clearer and more organized presentation of the services covered can help individuals easily understand what is available to them. By highlighting these key benefits, Medi-Cal can improve accessibility and encourage more people to take advantage of their health care options.

» Enhanced Care Management and Community Support Services Awareness: Community Supports provide valuable services, but many individuals struggle to understand if they qualify for these services. Enhancing clarity on eligibility requirements can help more people access the support they need. Additionally, improving communication about these services can ensure that members are aware of the full range of assistance available to them.

» Medi-Cal Mobile App: Medi-Cal members have expressed interest in a mobile app that allows easy access to their Medi-Cal Benefits Identification Card (BIC). They would like the app to include convenient features, such as quick access to important health information and real-time notifications. Having these tools readily available could improve user experience and streamline health care access. In response to these requests, plans are already in place to develop and launch a Medi-Cal mobile app. The app is expected to be available in 2026, providing a more efficient way for members to manage their Medi-Cal benefits.

» User Feedback and Implementation: Medi-Cal users want greater transparency in how their feedback is considered and integrated into system improvements. Providing regular updates on changes based on user input would help build trust and engagement within the community. By actively showcasing these improvements, Medi-Cal can demonstrate its commitment to meeting the needs of members.

» Excitement for New Website and Accessibility Improvements: Medi-Cal members are eagerly anticipating the launch of the new website, expecting a more user-friendly experience with improved navigation and accessibility features. The excitement stems from the hope that these enhancements will make it easier for all users, including people with disabilities, to effortlessly access important health care information and services.

» Impact of Federal Policy Changes: Federal policy changes have created uncertainty and confusion among Medi-Cal members, leading to growing concerns about their health care coverage. Many members fear that executive orders and budget cuts could negatively impact their access to essential health services. This anxiety is particularly strong among vulnerable populations who rely on Medi-Cal for regular medical care. Nonprofit organizations working closely with these communities have reported a noticeable increase in stress and worry among their clients. The lack of clear communication about potential changes has only added to the sense of instability. Members emphasize the need for transparent updates to help Medi-Cal members navigate these shifts with confidence.

» Fear of Accessing Services: Fear of accessing health care services has led to a noticeable decline in clinic visits, particularly among immigrant communities. Many individuals worry that seeking medical care could expose them to immigration enforcement, causing them to avoid necessary treatment. Concerns over data privacy have further intensified this fear, as some believe their personal

information could be used against them. Undocumented individuals feel especially vulnerable, unsure of whether their medical records might be shared with authorities. This widespread anxiety has had a ripple effect, discouraging even eligible community members from utilizing health care services. As a result, health care providers and advocates stress the importance of clear information to restore trust in medical systems.

» Broader Vulnerabilities and Anxiety in Communities: Policies affecting undocumented individuals and DACA recipients have created deep uncertainty and fear within these communities. Many members worry about how changes in immigration laws could impact their ability to access health care, education, and employment. Beyond immigration status, other vulnerable groups, such as low-income families and individuals with disabilities, also experience heightened anxiety about losing essential services. The uncertainty surrounding policy shifts has led to increased emotional distress, making it harder for affected individuals to seek help or plan. Community organizations report a growing need for mental health support and clearer communication to address these concerns.

Next Steps

The meeting concluded with an update to members regarding Bright Research Group (evaluation firm), which completed evaluation discussions and is expected to share a key findings report in April 2025. If members feel a follow-up discussion is necessary, the MMAC planning team is open to facilitating one. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 30, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. PDT via Zoom. Additionally, post-meeting group sessions and one-on-one check-ins will resume after the February meeting. Lastly, in response to a question about Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) group discussions in the December 2024 MMAC meeting, DHCS confirmed that it is still working on the next steps and will provide an update at the next MMAC meeting.

Closing Remarks

DHCS Director Baass provided closing remarks and expressed gratitude for the attendees' feedback on the website and emphasized the importance of their perspectives in shaping its features. Director Baass reassured members that the conversations would continue and thanked them for their support and engagement.