State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
Department of Health Care Services

BRADLEY P. GILBERT, MD, MPP
DIRECTOR

GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

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Jackie Glaze
CMS Acting Director
Medicaid & CHIP Operations Group Center for Medicaid & CHIP
Services 7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244
Jackie.Glaze@cms.hhs.gov

REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL SECTION 1135 WAIVER FLEXIBILITIES RELATED TO NOVEL CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) NATIONAL EMERGENCY/PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

Dear Ms. Glaze:

The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) writes to request approval for the below-detailed additional flexibilities under Section 1135 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. § 1320b-5) as related to the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). These flexibilities are in addition to the request submitted from DHCS on March 16, 2020. As you know, the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a national emergency on March 13, 2020, and was previously declared a nationwide public health emergency on January 31, 2020 (retroactive to January 27, 2020).

The below list represents California's additional requested flexibilities under the Section 1135 authority in connection with the COVID-19 outbreak and emergency based on further exploration of need. Because circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 emergency remain quite fluid, DHCS may subsequently request approval for additional flexibilities, which we can commit to doing promptly as soon as the need is discovered. Consistent with Section 1 of the President's March 13, 2020, national emergency declaration, DHCS requests a retroactive effective date of January 27, 2020, for the requested Section 1135 flexibilities to coincide with the effective start date of the Public Health Emergency, unless otherwise specified. In the event a requested flexibility below is not approvable under the Section 1135 authority, DHCS requests CMS technical assistance to identify any other authority (e.g. under the State Plan or Section 1115) for which approval may be available. Per our discussion with CMS on March 19, 2020, DHCS will request the flexibilities associated with Inmate and Institutions for Mental Disease (IMD) funding exclusions in the Section 1115 context (according to the forthcoming CMS instructions/Section 1115 template).

In addition, DHCS requests confirmation that any approved flexibility granted with respect to fee-for-service Medi-Cal benefits and providers would apply equally, to the extent applicable, to our various federally approved delivery systems, such as Medi-Cal managed care plans (MCPs), county organized health systems, county mental health plans, and Drug Medi-Cal organized delivery systems (DMC-ODS) and to the State's standalone Children's Health Insurance Program.

1. **Service authorization and utilization controls**, including but not necessarily limited to:

- Waiver of Attachment 3.1 – A.1, page 2 of the State Plan, exclusion of adult receipt of acetaminophen-containing and cough/cold products.

- For individuals with developmental disabilities receiving services under the State Plan 1915(i) authority, the state requests retainer payments. Retainer payments are available only for absences (maximum 30 consecutive days) in excess of the average number of absences experienced by the provider during the 12 month period prior to 2020.

- For Community-Based Adult Services (CBAS) – CBAS Benefit and Individual Plan of Care (IPC), the state requests:
    - Flexibility to reduce day center activities/gatherings and limit exposure to vulnerable populations.
    - Flexibility to utilize telephonic or live video interactions in lieu of face-to-face social/therapeutic visits.
    - Flexibility to utilize telephonic or live video interactions in lieu of face-to-face assessments.
    - Flexibility to allow following services to be provided at a beneficiary's home:
        - Physical Therapy
        - Occupational Therapy
    - Flexibility to provide or arrange for home delivered meals in absence of meals provided at the CBAS Center.
    - Flexibility for DHCS and MCPs to provide per diem payments to CBAS providers who provide telephonic or live video interactions in lieu of face-to-face social/therapeutic visits and/or assessments, arrange for home delivered meals in absence of meals provided at the CBAS Center, and/or provide physical therapy or occupational therapy in the home.

2. **Eligibility Flexibilities**, including but not necessarily limited to:

    - Flexibility in the hospital presumptive eligibility (HPE) program to cover more than one HPE period in a given 12-month timeframe. To the extent a beneficiary seeks care for coronavirus but has already used an HPE period in the last 12 months, or tests negative and then seeks care for a suspected episode later in the same 12-month period, HPE can provide a fast, low-barrier way to provide immediate, temporary coverage during the emergency period.

3. **Telehealth/Telephonic/Virtual Visits**, including but not necessarily limited to:

    - Waiver of 42 C.F.R. §438.6(c)(1), as necessary, to permit the State to direct MCO and PIHP payments to network providers, where telehealth/telephonic service is medically appropriate and feasible, at the same rate the MCO or PIHP would pay if the service was provided in person, unless the MCO/PIHP and the provider otherwise agree to a different rate for the telehealth modality.

    - Similar to flexibility granted at the federal level, DHCS requests authority for the State not to impose penalties for noncompliance with the regulatory requirements under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) against covered health care providers in connection with the good faith provision of telehealth during the COVID-19 emergency.

4. **Administrative Activities**, regarding deadlines and timetables for performance of required activities, DHCS requests extension of time for activities conducted by the state, MCPs, and/or county mental health and substance use disorder prepaid inpatient health plans (PIHPs), as applicable, due to social distancing to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to allow the state, MCP, and/or PIHP resources to prioritize COVID-19 response efforts including:

    - Waiver of the two-year claiming submission limit (42 USC §1320b-2; 45 CFR §95.1, et seq.) for federal financial participation or claiming adjustments with respect to medical assistance and administrative expenditures.

    - Waiver of the requirement in 42 CFR §447.45(d)(1), that DHCS require providers to submit all claims no later than 12 months from the date of service. DHCS is requesting authority to extend the 12-month timeframe for services provided with dates of service during this emergency.

    - Modification of the federal deadlines for submission of cost reports for Medicare and Medicaid (currently due Nov. 2020) by at least 6 months, with no late penalties, so that providers have time to file the appropriate documents. Many provider and hospital staff have been told to work remotely or have been reassigned to

emergency response activities, which will cause delays in meeting reporting timelines.

- Waiver of the timeframe required for financial oversight and medical compliance audits for PIHPs and State Plan Drug Medi-Cal counties. DHCS requests this waiver to allow flexibility regarding deploying staff resources to manage the emergency.

5. **Payment Rates**, including but not necessarily limited to:

- Waiver of the county interim rate setting methodology described beginning on page 10 of the Certified Public Expenditure (CPE) protocol approved through the 1915(b) waiver. The CPE protocol requires DHCS to calculate county interim rates using prior year cost reports trended forward using the Home Health Agency Market Basket Index or a CMS approved cost of living index. As utilization drops and costs increase during this emergency, DHCS is requesting authority to use alternative methodologies, at DHCS's discretion, to temporarily increase county interim rates.

- Waiver of the interim rate setting methodology described on page 5 and 6 of the Drug Medi-Cal Organized Delivery System (DMC ODS) Certified Public Expenditure protocol approved through the 1115 demonstration. The CPE protocol requires DHCS to reimburse DMC ODS counties on an interim basis pursuant to county developed and DHCS approved interim rates for each service, which are expected to be based upon the most recently calculated or estimated county costs for the specific service. DHCS is requesting authority, if counties reimburse DMC providers up to actual cost, to reimburse counties the federal and state share of their certified public expenditures for services rendered during this emergency.

- Waiver of the Statewide Maximum Allowance (SMA) rate limitation on interim reimbursement and final settlement for Drug Medi-Cal (DMC) services provided in state plan counties. California's State Plan describes the reimbursement methodology for DMC services in Attachment 4.19-B, pages 38-41b (SPA 09-022 and SPA 15-013), which limits interim payments to DMC providers to the lower of the SMA or the USDR (Section E.1, page 41). Furthermore, the Medicaid State Plan also limits final reimbursement to lower of actual cost, usual and customary charges, or the SMA for DMC providers. DHCS is requesting authority to waive the SMA and usual and customary charge limitations on interim and final reimbursement for DMC state plan services.

6. **Clarification of Previous Requests**:

- Item 2 in the March 16, 2020 1135 Waiver requested to waive various federal and State Plan requirements pertaining to service authorization and utilization controls

imposed on covered benefits. DHCS seeks to clarify that the requested waivers would extend to any limitations for elective procedures and informed consent (including, but not necessarily limited, to 42 C.F.R. § 441.253) to enable provider to postpone elective procedures to prioritize COVID-19 response activities. DHCS suggests extending the current 180-day limit for beneficiary informed consent to 360 days.

- Item 5 in the March 16, 2020 1135 Waiver requested to waive restrictions existing restrictions on individual counseling sessions under the Drug Medi-Cal state plan. DHCS wants to clarify that we are requesting to waive Supplement 3 to Attachment 3.1-B, to allow individual visits in lieu of group visits, and that these visits may be conducted by telephone, telehealth, and/or in-person. Waive the current restriction on individual visits (only allowed for intake, crisis intervention, collateral services, and treatment and discharge planning). Allow individual visits to be used for counseling focused on short-term personal, family, job/school and other problems and their relationship to substance use. This waiver is needed so the services previously provided in groups can be done in individual sessions during the emergency, to prevent COVID-19 exposure.

- Item 6 in the March 16, 2020 1135 Waiver requested to waive State Plan Attachment 4.19-D, including any applicable Supplements, which establishes the payment methodology for Intermediate Care Facilities for the Developmentally Disabled (ICF-DD) and skilled nursing facilities (SNFs). The state wanted to clarify that the waiver being requested would apply to all SNF and ICF-DD facility types and the reimbursement flexibilities would not be limited solely to the costs associated with suspension of Day Programs. SNFs and ICF-DDs are experiencing increased cost pressures in a variety of areas as a result of the COVID-19 response and the state is seeking flexibility to allow consideration of all costs being incurred by facilities to ensure the health and safety of residents.

7. Flexibilities to be Requested under Section 1115 Authority (according to forthcoming CMS guidance):

- Waiver of the inmate exclusion (42 U.S.C. §1396d(a)(30)(A)) to allow for Medi-Cal claiming for services provided ***in*** jails and prisons for the testing, diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 or services to ensure other care is provided in a safe way without transporting individuals to acute care facilities.

- Waiver of the 16-bed limitation/prohibition on receipt of federal financial participation for patients residing in Institutions for Mental Disease (IMD) pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §1396d(a)(30)(B). DHCS believes waiver of the IMD exclusion is necessary to temporarily increase bed capacity for affected beneficiaries and to allow facilities to claim for services provided for these

additional beds. Evaluation of less restritictive settings would be completed prior to placement.

During such difficult times for California and the nation, DHCS greatly appreciates the prompt attention exhibited by CMS to these matters and we look forward to the continued partnership.

Sincerely,

Jacey Cooper
Chief Deputy Director
Health Care Programs
State Medicaid Director

cc: Bradley P. Gilbert, MD, MPP
Director
Department of Health Care Services

Erika Sperbeck
Chief Deputy Director
Policy & Program Support
Department of Health Care