



Lessons from California: Medi-Cal Coverage For Former Foster Youth November 2015

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THE ISSUE:

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires states to provide Medicaid to youth who are in foster care on their 18th birthday, or who “age out” of foster care at a higher age, and to keep them on Medicaid until they turn age 26. While California implemented the [Former Foster Care Program](#) (FFCP) in Medi-Cal starting on January 1, 2014, numerous problems with implementation have plagued the program and kept many eligible youth from being enrolled. For example, the California Healthcare Eligibility, Enrollment and Retention System (CalHEERS), the single streamlined application (SSApp) for Medi-Cal and Marketplace enrollment, was not programmed correctly to disregard income of former foster youth (FFY). As a result, these youth were incorrectly denied Medi-Cal and instead placed in coverage in Covered California, many with premium tax credits. Therefore these youth were advised not to enroll through the CalHEERS portal, but instead told to apply at the Medi-Cal county offices directly.

STRATEGY AND ACTIONS:

Through extensive involvement and the advocacy of NHeLP and other key children’s advocacy groups, crucial improvements were recently made to this program, which resulted in California becoming a model for other states in implementing the FFCP, including:

- (1) CalHEERS programming changes were made in October, which addressed the inappropriate counting on income for FFY who apply for coverage through the CalHEERS SSApp. The state Medicaid agency also issued [instructions to counties](#) to process the cases of FFY who had applied for coverage through CalHEERS after January 2014, but who were not correctly given Medi-Cal.
- (2) The state Medicaid agency implemented Hospital Presumptive Eligibility (HPE) for FFY who applied and were immediately enrolled in HPE at a participating hospital. The change in [policy](#) allowed FFY to be enrolled directly from HPE coverage into the FFCP without the youth needing to apply separately for Medi-Cal.
- (3) The state Medicaid agency developed standardized [notices of action and informational letter](#) specifically for FFY and required counties program these notices and issue them in all cases related to FFCP eligibility.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Federal Guidance](#)

[Medi-Cal Eligibility
Information Letter 15-28](#)

[All County Letter 15-29](#)

[All County Letter 15-32](#)

[All County Letter 15-37](#)

[All County Letter 14-41](#)

[Covered until 26](#) website