

# California Healthcare Reforms Impacting Current and Former Foster Youth



Children and youth currently or formerly involved in the child welfare system have unique healthcare needs and often face barriers to accessing care. Currently, there are a variety of statewide healthcare reform initiatives being developed or implemented that will impact healthcare provision and access for them.

## Background

**California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal** (CalAIM) is the Department of Health Care Services' (DHCS') long-term plan to improve Medi-Cal service coordination and provision.<sup>1</sup> DHCS and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) established the CalAIM Foster Care Model of Care Workgroup in 2020 to develop a model of care for better meeting the unique needs of children and youth in foster care.<sup>2</sup> While the State has not developed a comprehensive model of care as a result of this workgroup, some of the workgroup recommendations have been incorporated into various reform initiatives. Changes focused on the child welfare population that have been made or are planned through CalAIM include:

- **Simplifying access to Specialty Mental Health Services** so that children involved in child welfare can access services based on their history of trauma without requiring a diagnosis (Effective January 1, 2022).
- Providing **Enhanced Care Management** for children and youth with child welfare involvement who are enrolled in managed care plans (expected July 1, 2023).

In late 2022, DHCS released a **California Behavioral Health Community-Based Continuum (CalBH-CBC) Demonstration** concept paper that describes plans to apply for a Medicaid Section 1115 demonstration to strengthen the behavioral health service continuum for Medi-Cal beneficiaries with a serious mental illness or serious emotional disturbance.<sup>3</sup> It includes the following proposals focused on children and youth with child welfare involvement:

- **Cross-sector Incentive Pool** designed to incentivize Medi-Cal managed care plans and county behavioral health and child welfare agencies to work together and collectively reward them for meeting specified outcome measures.
- **Activity Stipends** for children in the child welfare system to support activities such as sports, music, art, and mindfulness programs to promote social and emotional well-being.
- **Child Welfare and Mental Health Joint Assessment at Entry into Child Welfare.**
- Consideration of Medi-Cal managed care plan contract changes to require a **dedicated Foster Care liaison.**
- **Clarifying Medi-Cal coverage for three evidence-based practices for children and youth.** DHCS indicates it may request authority to make other targeted improvements for children and youth involved in child welfare.

In November 2022, DHCS released a **Medi-Cal Foster Care Strategies document** outlining additional tactics it is taking or planning to take to better meet the needs of children and youth involved in the child welfare system, some of which are part of the CalBH-CBC and CalAIM initiatives.<sup>4</sup> Others include, but are not limited to: providing current and former foster youth the option to enroll in Kaiser as a Medi-Cal managed care plan in 32 counties; strengthening statewide standards and clinical guidance to ensure children and youth involved in the child welfare system get medically necessary mental health services; and aligning use of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths assessment tool across child welfare and behavioral health systems. Finally, the Health Care Program for Children in Foster Care is expected to transition to a stand-alone program by July 2024 as the Child Health and Disability Prevention Program sunsets.<sup>5</sup>

## Next Steps

Moving forward, it will be important to have robust and authentic engagement of child welfare stakeholders in the design and implementation of these various initiatives and identification of additional needed reforms; coordination between efforts; and strong oversight and monitoring to ensure the reforms ultimately have their intended impact.

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<sup>1</sup> Additional information is available on the CalAIM webpage at <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/CalAIM/Pages/calaim.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Additional information about the Foster Care Model of Care Workgroup is available at <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/provgovpart/Pages/Foster-Care-Model-Workgroup.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Additional information is available on the CalBH-CBC webpage at <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/CalAIM/Pages/CalBH-CBC.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> The DHCS Medi-Cal Foster Care Strategies document is available at <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/DHCS-Medi-Cal-Foster-Care-Strategies-11-22-2022.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Additional information on the CHDP transition is available at <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/chdp/Pages/CHDP-Transition.aspx>