

Realizing the Promise of Reforms: An Advocate's Perspective

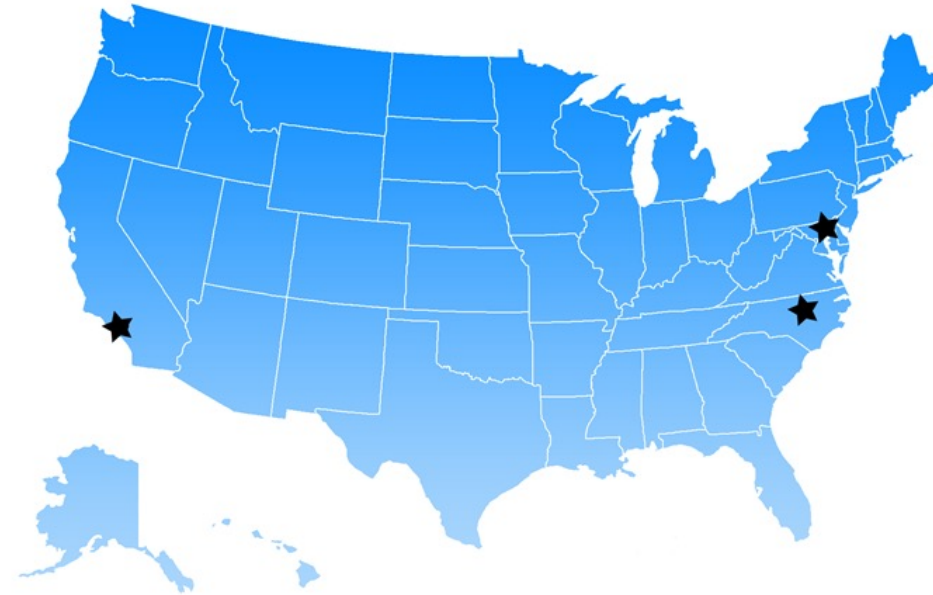
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About the National Health Law Program

- NHeLP is a nonprofit law firm that protects and advances the health care rights of low income and underserved individuals and families in California and across the country
- State and local partnerships with legal aid, disability rights, and health advocates
- National partners
- Offices: CA, DC, NC



Framing the Goal

What is important here?

- State policy reform is an important first step
- Policy reform \neq meaningful change on-the-ground
- **Our goal: Foster youth have access to the behavioral health services and supports that they need**
- Real change results from effective implementation of policy reform *at every level*

How do we ensure effective implementation?

Evaluating County Implementation



Policy & Procedure Review



Data Review



Qualitative Research



Policy & Procedure Review

- NHeLP has reviewed the written policies and procedures of the five counties with the largest foster care populations
- Obtained through Public Record Act (PRA) requests and a review of published materials
- Analyzed for compliance with new SMHS access criteria and other important beneficiary protections



Policy & Procedure Review

- Preliminary Observations:
 - Counties have been slow to incorporate the SMHS access criteria into their own policies and procedures
 - Beneficiary Handbooks have been outdated
- Report Forthcoming



Data Review

- NHeLP has reviewed data related to the usage of SMHS, Intensive Care Coordination (ICC), and Intensive Home Based Services (IHBS) by children and youth in the five counties with the largest foster youth populations
- Data obtained via two state-run reporting systems or “dashboards,” which are publicly available
- Service usage by foster youth compared to usage by all youth and to statewide data



Data Review

- Preliminary Observations:
 - Data types are limited
 - Inter-county data is not available
 - Data is not made available in a timely manner
 - Because the most recent data is from 2021, we cannot currently evaluate differences in SMHS usage before and after the access criteria reform
 - Existing state data dashboards are difficult to navigate and create confusion
- Report Forthcoming



Qualitative Research

- NHeLP has conducted a survey of advocates and providers in the five counties with the largest foster care populations
- Additionally, we have conducted “secret shopper” calls to the 24/7 Mental Health Access Lines in each of these counties
- Stakeholder feedback and direct observation of how these systems are functioning provides important contextual detail



Qualitative Research

- Preliminary Observations:
 - Waitlists for SMHS are common
 - There are not enough providers to meet demand
 - Mental health access lines in some counties are not functioning the way they should
- Report Forthcoming

Conclusion

Heightened oversight of county implementation is needed and should incorporate:

- Regular review of county policies and procedures (more often than triennially)
- Collection and review of additional and more timely data
- Feedback from stakeholders with real-time, lived experience



New Resources for Foster Youth

Foster Youth Resources

- NHeLP, in partnership with the National Center for Youth Law, recently released a suite of infographics aimed at helping foster youth better understand the services available to them through California's Medicaid program
- [Guide to Accessing Medi-Cal Mental Health Services for Current and Former Foster Youth](#)
- [Reproductive and Sexual Health Resources for California Foster Youth](#)

A GUIDE TO ACCESSING MEDI-CAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR CURRENT AND FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

About This Guide

This guide provides information and resources to current and former foster youth on how to access mental health services through California's Medicaid program (Medi-Cal).

Who is a "current foster youth" under Medi-Cal?

A current foster youth is someone who is in foster care *right now*. This includes non-minor dependents in extended foster care.

What about a "former foster youth"?

A former foster youth is someone who was in foster care in *any* state on their 18th birthday or later.



If you're unsure whether you're a current or former foster youth, contact the **Foster Care Ombudsman Office** at 1-877-846-1602 or fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov

If you're not a foster youth, you may still qualify for Medi-Cal mental health services for other reasons. Check out Page 5 of this guide for additional resources.

Need mental health help now?

Free. No insurance needed.

- Family Urgent Response System (FURS) (available 24/7 for current and former foster youth): Call or text 1-833-939-3877, or chat online at Cal-FURS.org
- Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741-741
- The Trevor Project (for LGBTQIA+ youth): Call 1-866-488-7386, text START to 678-678, or chat online at thetrevorproject.org/webchat
- CalHOPE (for peer support): Call 833-317-HOPE (4673) or chat online at calhopeconnect.org



MEDI-CAL ABORTION SERVICES



IS ABORTION LEGAL IN CALIFORNIA?

Yes! In California, a person has a **legal right to obtain an abortion**.

DOES MEDI-CAL COVER ABORTION?

Yes, California **covers abortions for all Medi-Cal enrollees** and all services related to getting an abortion. For foster youth and former foster youth, there is no out of pocket costs.

WHERE CAN I GET AN ABORTION?

You can get an abortion by **asking your health care provider**. To find out who is your provider, call your Medi-Cal health plan. You can also go to any abortion provider that accepts Medi-Cal, even if they are not part of your health plan.



WHAT IF I HAVE TROUBLE GETTING AN ABORTION?

The Health Consumer Alliance (HCA) offers free assistance over-the-phone or in-person to help people who are struggling to get or maintain health coverage and resolve problems with their health plans. They can assist individuals accessing abortion care. You can **reach the HCA** at 1-888-804-3536 (TTY 1-877-735-2929) or at <https://healthconsumer.org/>.

ACCESS Reproductive Justice operates a free healthline to provide information, referrals, procedural, and practical support around abortion care, birth control, and other reproductive health services. You can **reach ACCESS** at 1-800-376-4636 or at <https://accessrj.org/access-rj-online-request-form/>.

You can **call your attorney**. If you are in foster care in Los Angeles County, Placer County, or Sacramento County, you can call your attorney at Children's Law Center.

You also can **call your social worker and/or CASA** to ask for help.

You can also **talk to the Foster Care Ombuds Office** to find out about all your rights, have someone hear what is going wrong, or get help. Go to fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov or call 1-877-846-1602 or email fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov.

DO I NEED TO TELL ANYBODY ABOUT THE ABORTION?

Youth of any age can get an abortion without the permission of and without having to tell their parent/guardian, spouse/partner, social worker, foster caregiver, or the biological parent of the fetus.

Your health care provider also cannot tell your parent/guardian, spouse/partner, social worker, foster caregiver, or the biological parent of the fetus, that you got an abortion, unless you give the health care provider permission to tell.



Thank you!

Connect with the National Health Law Program:



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