

California Healthline asked the California Department of Health Care Services to respond to questions about the Little Hoover Commission's report on Denti-Cal.

Here's a transcript:

What's being done to streamline the long application form for Medi-Cal dentists?

DHCS must adhere to specific federal rules that require the collection of certain information that might not be required in a commercial insurance plan. However, DHCS is consulting with providers, stakeholders, and others to identify how we can streamline the provider enrollment application process, as well as reduce administrative barriers in the Denti-Cal program.

How do you answer a charge that "Denti-Cal ranks among state government's greatest deficiencies," and that it falls "disastrously short" in providing dental care to Medi-Cal beneficiaries?

DHCS is strongly committed to providing access to quality dental care for our millions of Medi-Cal members, and Director Jennifer Kent has publicly stated that improving the Denti-Cal program is one of her top priorities. DHCS has established new processes to help ensure members receive timely access to Medi-Cal dental services. DHCS has taken very seriously the recommendations made by the California State Auditor (CSA) and the concerns raised by the Legislature and stakeholders. DHCS received 24 recommendations from the CSA, 23 of which are being implemented: 15 have been completed and 8 are still in progress. Some brief examples of the work we have done include:

Establishing beneficiary and provider participation metrics to better assess access and utilization.

Reinstituting the annual rate studies.

Working with Delta Dental to establish annual outreach plans, particularly in underserved areas, as well as develop alternative access points, such as mobile clinics.

Continuing to evaluate administrative simplifications, including in the last year removing a requirement for x-rays for certain services

We also have several monitoring efforts underway, including ongoing public reporting on performance measures for dental managed care plans (quarterly reporting) and the fee-for-service Denti-Cal program (annual reporting). There are 11 performance measures that are reported. You can find out more at the following links:

Fee-For-Service Performance Measures:

http://www.denti-cal.ca.gov/WSI/Bene.jsp?fname=FFS_perf_meas

Dental Managed Care Performance Measures:

http://www.denti-cal.ca.gov/WSI/ManagedCare.jsp?fname=dental_managed_care_plan_util

What's being done to increase children's utilization rates? And how has that utilization number changed over the past two years. Have you met expectations for improvement?

Improving the performance of Denti-Cal is a top priority, and DHCS is constantly exploring ways to enhance both access and the quality of dental care provided. DHCS uses a multi-pronged effort to monitor access and identify geographic regions or demographics that may have access issues. As part of the federal government's approval of our access monitoring program, DHCS reports to the federal government on three metrics specific to the dental program – the percentage change of beneficiary enrollment, provider participation ratios, and the percentage of children visiting a dentist in the last 12 months. All three indicators are stratified by age and other demographic information, and DHCS monitors this data on a regular basis. DHCS also collects provider disenrollment information to assess the impact of disenrollments to the provider network and any impact this may have on access to care in the fee-for-service delivery system.

DHCS has also established new processes to help ensure beneficiaries receive timely access to Medi-Cal dental services. For example, DHCS maintains a referral list of dental providers willing to accept new patients to facilitate referrals and serve as a resource to beneficiaries seeking dental appointments. This referral list is available for reference on the Denti-Cal website for quick/easy access by dental providers and beneficiaries. DHCS also maintains a Telephone Service Center through which beneficiaries may receive assistance locating a provider in their area and scheduling a dental appointment. In addition, DHCS has launched a call-out program to remind families that their children are due for check-ups and to remind them that these services are covered.

Overall, children's utilization of dental services has increased. About 5.6 million children receive Medi-Cal dental services, and 2.5 million of these children (44%) received an annual dental visit in fiscal year 2013-14. This is an increase from 37% in federal fiscal year 2011, according to the CMS Oral Health Initiative.

Also, it would be good to have a quick outline of the goals the department has set for this year. I'll be mentioning the waiver money, the dental home project and the mobile van effort, but a quick summary of improvement efforts would be good.

CMS approved \$740 million, with the opportunity to earn an additional \$10 million, for the Dental Transformation Initiative (DTI) as part of the Medi-Cal 2020 waiver. Over the course of the waiver demonstration, DHCS will implement and operate the DTI's four domains, which include Increase Preventive Services Utilization for Children; Caries Risk Assessment and Disease Management Pilot; Increase the Continuity of Care; and Local Dental Pilot Programs. Eligible providers participating in one or more domains may receive incentive payments by satisfying the requirements set forth for each domain. The four domains of the DTI are designed to focus on specific oral health needs for children in California.

On March 16, CMS approved State Plan Amendment 15-005 to allow registered dental hygienists, registered dental hygienists in extended functions, and registered dental hygienists in alternative practice to enroll as billing and rendering providers in the Medi-Cal Dental Services Program. This is a positive step forward in increasing the network of available service providers for Medi-Cal beneficiaries.

DHCS' Medi-Cal dental fiscal intermediary, Delta Dental, contracts with mobile dental vans to provide services in specific areas. In 2015, Delta contracted with Health Mobile to serve 122 adults and children at mobile dental clinics in Alpine, Amador, and Calaveras counties. Delta also contracted with Healthy Smiles in 2015 to serve 152 children at mobile dental clinics in Merced and Mariposa counties. Individuals treated received an exam, cleaning, sealants, and restorative services. We are looking at continuing this service in 2016.

DHCS will be undertaking efforts to update our provider files to more accurately reflect dental providers who are actively treating and accepting new Medi-Cal beneficiaries.