NJ Human Services Works to Protect & Help Maintain Continued Benefits for Residents Amid COVID-19 Outbreak

Actions Address Child care, Seniors, Homeless, Medicaid, Mental Health, Substance Use Disorder and Disability Services

March 18, 2020

(TRENTON) – To protect the health and safety of the individuals we serve and help maintain vital social service benefits continue to do so, New Jersey Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson today outlined steps the Department has taken to assist and protect those we serve amid the ongoing work to contain COVID-19.

“During these challenging times, Human Services is committed to continuing to protect and care for those across the state who depend on c critical services,” Commissioner Johnson said. “Human service providers are first responders in this crisis and the health and safety of those we and our community partners serve is our top priority. We’ve taken steps to offer assistance to child care providers so that they can remain open and continue to provide care; to make it easier for Medicaid beneficiaries to refill their prescriptions early and stock a 90-day supply of their maintenance medications; to protect older residents and individuals with developmental disabilities by moving swiftly to end congregate activities; and to create opportunities to help New Jerseyans receiving opioid use disorder treatment retain access to care. We’re going to continuously review our policies and services as the situation evolves and take all available action to protect our most vulnerable residents.”

Actions taken by the Department of Human Services include:

Supporting Individuals and Families with Children:

Child Care

- Waiving parent co-pays in state’s child care subsidy for parents who request it due to impacts from COVID-19;
- Providing an additional $100 per child per month to child care providers for children in the State child care subsidy program to help child care centers remain open during this critical time to support working parents, emergency and essential personnel; and
- Making grant funding available to child care centers to support cleaning supplies or services.

Cash, Shelter and Food Assistance

- Automatically extending for 60 days WorkFirst New Jersey cash assistance to individuals whose case is up for renewal in March or April;
- Extending all Emergency Assistance cases through April 30;
- Deeming the current state of emergency as a good cause exemption for the work requirements in WorkFirst New Jersey and SNAP and suspending all adverse actions for non-compliance;
- Convening New Jersey food banks and community pantries to focus on preparedness planning and distribution; and
- Working with homeless shelters to address cleaning and self-isolation policies.

NJ FamilyCare/Medicaid

- Covering COVID-19 testing, visits for testing, and testing-related services at no cost;
- Waiving costs for COVID-19 testing, visits for testing, and testing-related services in the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP);
- Covering 90-day supplies of prescriptions for maintenance medications and early refills of prescriptions in Medicaid and CHIP; and
- Directing hospitals to waive cost sharing for uninsured individuals who are eligible for charity care for medically necessary testing and testing-related services for the COVID-19 virus.

Supporting Older Residents

- Mobilizing nurse care managers at Medicaid health plans to call high risk populations to identify and address their critical needs including supplies such as durable medical equipment and food;
- Allowing older residents receiving prescription drugs through Medicaid or the state prescription drug assistance program (PAAD and Senior Gold) to refill their prescriptions early and receive 90-day supplies of maintenance medications;
- Working with our county partners to ensure that those receiving home-delivered meals continue to have access to food;
- Partnering with counties to end congregate dining in senior centers while helping to ensure that participants continue to have access to food;
- Working with counties to support telephone outreach to seniors known to be socially isolated;
- Encouraging health care providers to use telehealth for routine visits, as appropriate;
- Working closely with community and institutional providers to ensure resident needs are met; and
- Conducting telephonic outreach for our most vulnerable residents seeking enrollment in social service benefits.

Supporting Individuals with Disabilities:

- Temporarily closing congregate day programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and supporting this transition;
- Providing flexibility to families to quickly hire workers and working closely with program providers and direct support professionals during the closure;
- Releasing guidance for community providers of services to the developmentally disabled on COVID-19 preparedness;
- Keeping residents who are deaf or hard of hearing informed through American Sign Language videos, interpreters at State emergency response press conferences, and other activities; and
- Conducting outreach to clients who depend on our Personal Assistance Service Program for individuals with physical disabilities and our Traumatic Brain Injury Fund to ensure needs are being met.

Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services:

- Issue guidance toOpioid Treatment Programs, which provide essential medication such as methadone or buprenorphine to individuals with an opioid use disorder, on ensuring the safe provision of medication including take-home medication;
- Releasing guidance mental health and substance use disorder providers on preparedness and response, including ensuring continued access to services for individuals in need of services; and
- Working closely with community providers to identify and ensure needs are met.

Department of Human Services

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Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD)
Division of Disability Services (DDS)
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Department of Human Services
222 South Warren Street
PO Box 700
Trenton, NJ 08625-0700