DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

News stories

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Minnesota bolsters health care programs in pandemic

Human services commissioner uses emergency authority to ensure people remain covered and can access care and prescriptions

April 9, 2020

During the coronavirus pandemic, Minnesotans who rely on Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare should know that their health care coverage is secure and that they have improved access to telemedicine and extended supplies of many prescription drugs.

Commissioner Jodi Harpstead has taken multiple steps under her emergency authority to waive and modify procedures during the COVID-19 peacetime emergency declared by Governor Tim Walz. Changes she has approved include:

- Restoring coverage for people whose enrollment was due to expire at end of March
- Postponing renewals, which could have led to gaps in coverage over paperwork issues
- Suspending case closures unless a person requests one, moves out of state, or passes away
- Expanding access to telemedicine for health care and home and community-based waiver programs
- Allowing people to get up to a 90-day supply of prescriptions for maintenance medications, but not controlled substances
- Eliminating co-payments and other cost-sharing for COVID-19 testing and treatment

“People need to know they’re safe and they don’t need to worry about losing their coverage during this unprecedented crisis,” Harpstead said. “It’s also important to remember that enrollment in public health care programs is always available, and we encourage people who have lost coverage to find out if they are eligible.”

Many Minnesotans who need health care coverage can apply for Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare at any time through MNsure (https://www.mnsure.org/) or by calling 855-366-7873. Individuals who are 65 years or older, blind or have a disability and need Medical Assistance must submit a paper application through their county or tribal agency.

Medical Assistance is Minnesota’s Medicaid program for people with low income. MinnesotaCare provides health care coverage for low-income Minnesotans who earn too much to qualify for Medical Assistance but cannot afford to buy coverage on their own. Eligibility for Medical Assistance (https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/seniors/health-care/health-care-programs/programs-and-services/medical-assistance.jsp) and MinnesotaCare (https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/adults/health-care/health-care-programs/programs-and-services/minnesotacare.jsp) is based on income and other factors.

Minnesota has requested and received federal approvals to make these changes, with details posted on the Department of Human Services’ public website (https://mn.gov/dhs/).

Executive Order 20-12 (https://mn.gov/governor/assets/FINAL_EO-20-12_%20DHS%20Commissioner%20Authority_tcm1055-424360.pdf), signed by Governor Walz on March 20, allows the Department of Human Services to temporarily waive or modify state requirements to ensure that services can be delivered safely and without undue delay, protecting vulnerable Minnesotans and those who care for them. The agency provides health care coverage, programs and services for more than 1 million Minnesotans.

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4/9/2020 12:00:00 PM

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Updated: 2020-04-09