March 17, 2020

DHS Submitting Federal Waivers to Ensure Continued Access to Medical Assistance and Flexibility to Meet the Needs of Iowans

(Des Moines, Iowa) – The Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) is taking a number of steps to ensure continued access to critical services during the COVID-19 global pandemic. DHS is exploring all opportunities for flexibility to provide public assistance. Medical, Food and Cash Assistance will continue for current recipients. DHS will be submitting §1115, §1915(c) and §1135 waivers to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to ensure continuous coverage for recipients of Medical Assistance in Iowa and to ensure providers are able to provide much needed services during this emergency.

Iowa's §1115 and §1915(c) waivers will allow us to:

- Waive co-pays and premiums for Iowa Health and Wellness Plan (IHAWP), Medicaid for Employed People with Disabilities (MEPD), Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Hawki and Dental Wellness Plan members;
- Pause all dis-enrollments for our medical assistance programs;
    - Continuous eligibility for adults
    - CHIP kids who age out will be enrolled in IHAWP
- Equip hospitals to determine presumptive eligibility for categorically eligible members;
- Provide home delivered meals for non-waiver members who are home-bound;
- Provide home delivered meals for waiver members where the waiver does not have meals as an allowable service;
- Allow additional flexibility for home- and community-based services (HCBS) providers to continue to meet our member's needs throughout the duration of the disaster proclamation.

Under the §1135 waiver, Iowa requests a waiver of the following regulatory requirements:
Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities:

- Direct care residential living unit staff: Such authority will permit modifications to direct care staff numbers if required because of reduced staff availability due to the national emergency.
- Continuous active treatment program: This authority will allow for the health and safety needs of residents to be met if sufficient staff are unavailable to implement continuous active treatment due to the national emergency.
- Preventive Care and Dental Services: This will allow for flexibility if the timeliness requirements cannot be met due to the national emergency.
- Housing of similar ages, developmental levels and social needs: This will allow for movement and housing based on availability of sufficient staffing and potential health issues of clients.

Nursing Facility Pre-Admission Screening

- Preadmission screening of applicants for admissions to nursing facilities: Temporary suspension of pre-admission screening and annual resident review which will allow a nursing home to continue admission of an individual who has not had assessment completed if there is a workforce disruption or hospitals reduce or limit outside contact in their facilities.

Hospitals

- 24-hour nursing requirement: This will permit a nurse to cover more than one ward in the event of staffing shortages caused by the national emergency.

DHS is requesting the waivers be effective March 13, 2020, in alignment with the President's national emergency proclamation. We're also developing similar waivers for our other public assistance programs, such as Food and Cash Assistance. We will share additional information in the coming days and weeks. We all have to do our part to care for and support our fellow Iowans during this critical time.

####

For more information
Matt Highland
mhighla@dhs.state.ia.us
515-281-4848