



Improving Enrollment in Medicaid for Former Foster Care Youth

Young adults who have aged out of the foster care system are at high risk for experiencing homelessness, lack of physical and behavioral health care, unemployment and other adverse situations. Under the Affordable Care Act, states are required to assure continued access to Medicaid and health care services until the youth reaches his or her 26th birthday. Implementation of this important option for vulnerable youth, however, has lagged in Pennsylvania as well as other states.

While the Department of Human Services (DHS) has begun to address this issue through operations memoranda, policy clarifications, and outreach efforts, we believe that additional strategies would further increase enrollment and thereby access to health care. No youth losing Medicaid coverage in either PC 31 or PC 33 should go without coverage through another category.

➤ Automate the transfer from PC 31 or 33 to PC 40

Youth who are aging out of foster care at age 18 or older are especially vulnerable to a disruption in coverage. They may go without needed medications or care during a gap in coverage.

To assure continuity of coverage when the youth ages out, PC31 or PC33 should be closed and PC40 should be automatically opened without an action from the caseworker. If the caseworker has information that the youth is a parent, pregnant or has a disability, the caseworker can manually open in that category. If the caseworker has confirmed other information that the youth is not eligible, such as having moved out-of-state, the caseworker shall take action to terminate coverage.

Automation which assures that young adults between the ages of 18 and 26 who were in the PC 31 or PC33 categories at age 18 or older are presumed to be in the PC 40 category unless information is provided to the contrary will maximize coverage and ease the day-to-day work of the CAO.

➤ **Create a short form for applications and renewals**

Several states including Oregon, California, and Nevada have created short, one-page forms for foster youth to apply for Medicaid and renew coverage. These forms collect the information necessary to authorize coverage for former foster youth but are not burdened by questions irrelevant to the former foster youth category.

In some states these forms can be submitted by the youth either at the point of aging out or later if the youth is still under age 26 and/or it can be submitted by the foster care agency prior to discharge. It is also used to streamline the renewal process.

A one-page form is recommended for former foster youth, particularly those most disconnected from other support services. It obtains the information needed to authorize Medicaid coverage, meeting both DHS' need for verification and the youth's need for health care coverage. Further the short form can be used for renewal for all former foster youth thereby simplifying continuity of coverage.

➤ **Provide additional training for caseworkers on the former foster youth category – for both application and renewal**

The last 12 months have been an extraordinary period of changes in processes and procedures for Medicaid coverage. The shift to MAGI-based rules, the expansion of Medicaid for adults and referrals to and from the Health Care Marketplace are complex. It is not surprising that many caseworkers are not fully aware of the former foster youth category and its eligibility rules. Many former foster youth report that the caseworker was unaware of this new category and to whom it applied.

While DHS has issued policy clarifications and operations memos, caseworkers have been overwhelmed by the volume of applications during that time period and may not have fully grasped these new rules. Additional training on both the application process and the critical renewal process is vital to assuring that former foster youth who navigate the current application or renewal process are treated correctly.

➤ **Improve COMPASS logic to skip unneeded questions for former foster youth**

Pennsylvania's COMPASS system is a critical link to social services throughout the Commonwealth and is particularly suited to reaching this population. Available 24/7, COMPASS offers an additional gateway to Medicaid coverage. However, for former foster youth, it is cumbersome to navigate the pages that ask for information that is

irrelevant for the former foster youth category. Pages cannot be skipped and the time needed to complete the application increases to frustrating levels.

However, COMPASS can be programmed to skip unneeded questions and has already established a “sorting” question early in the application process. In the household section, pertinent questions about household composition (whether or not there is a child in the household) and pregnancy status are asked. Therefore, a “yes” answer to the question asked about former foster youth status when there are no children and no one is pregnant can serve as the skipping point, eliminating the questions about income, tax status, tax deductions and assets, etc.

This streamlining of the application and renewal processes would allow former foster youth an easy pathway to coverage and DHS’ internal processes can confirm receipt of foster care and Medicaid at age 18 or older.

- **Ease enrollment for former foster youth who were in foster care in another state.**

Pennsylvania has rightly opted to cover youth who were in foster care in another state. Proving receipt of foster care in another state at 18 or older, however, can be challenging. Self-attestation of receipt of foster care should be allowed and coverage should be authorized for a 90 day period while the caseworker verifies that the youth was in foster care. Policy should clarify that if the young adult does not have any documents easily available to verify former foster youth status in another state, the CAO will make the verification. The CAO can verify the young adult’s former foster youth status through any of the following methods:

- Call the state child welfare agency where the young adult reports being in foster care and ask for verification. (Here is a link to the state child welfare agencies: https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp_website.cfm?rs_ID=16&rate_chno=AZ-0004E)
- Call the Independent Living Coordinator for the state where the young adult was in foster care. (Here is a link to the list of state Independent Living Coordinators: <http://nrcyd.ou.edu/state-pages/coordinators>.)
- Contact the Pennsylvania Office of Children, Youth, and Families for assistance: Ms. Lauren Cummings, State Foster Care Manager for Pennsylvania, at 717-787-7759; or the Independent Living Coordinator at 717-705-2911

- **Provide information about the former foster youth category on COMPASS’ front page.**

Outreach to former foster youth must be widespread, on-going, and the information provided should be easily acted upon. Providing information through a pop-up or link to an information page about the category, the eligibility rules and how to apply on the COMPASS front page would allow former foster youth to navigate the COMPASS application and renewal processes. Ideally, the information would provide a link to the shortened version of the COMPASS application for former youth as described above. But a relatively easy first step is to provide a link to information.

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