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Health Practice Tip August 2014

Help! I have clients who applied for Medi-Cal months ago and still haven't heard anything. How can I help them?

Nearly 10 months after the start of enrollment for the Medi-Cal expansion, many applicants are still waiting for their Medi-Cal cards. If you are working with people in this situation, they may be stuck in the Medi-Cal application backlog. While the overall program fix still seems a long time coming, there are things advocates can do to try to move their clients' cases along.

1. Use your contacts at your county social services office.

More than usual, the difference in information at the county director level and the eligibility worker level is vast due to a number of circumstances: eligibility workers were not initially trained on the Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) rules; computer fixes and workarounds have been rolling out on a weekly basis; instructions from DHCS change frequently; and glitches still exist in the system that only certain workers in any given county have the authority to override. Advocates will need to rely on their contacts at the county or whatever local procedures they have to elevate individual cases such as filing trouble tickets or contacting a liaison. [MEDIL 14-11](#) is still in effect and instructs counties to use workarounds for anyone with immediate medical needs if the system cannot correctly determine eligibility.

2. Request a hearing for any cases pending longer than 45 days.

While it can be frustrating to request a hearing where there is no actual disagreement about eligibility, requesting hearings is still an important tool to preserve your clients' rights. Anyone who has been waiting more than 45 days has the right to a hearing, even if no notice or decision has been sent. [DSS ACL 14-14](#) covers hearing procedures for MAGI Medi-Cal and Covered California. Note: if there is any question as to which program your client should be in or you have a family with both Covered California and Medi-Cal coverage, a dual agency hearing may be required. Clients whose health may be in jeopardy should request an expedited hearing. Western Center advocates can help with hearing claims or provide sample decisions if requested.

3. Try the DHCS liaison.

As part of the state's mitigation plan in response to a federal inquiry on California's backlog crisis, DHCS promised a liaison to advocates to help resolve their clients' cases. Donna

Brass has been identified as the state liaison to help when you strike out at the county. She can be reached at Donna.Brass@dhcs.ca.gov or 909-390-4127. Her supervisor, Rose Pankratz (Rose.Pankratz@dhcs.ca.gov) should be cc'd on any requests and she may be reached at 909-390-4348. Please keep notes of any cases sent to the liaison as Western Center would like to track the ability of the liaison to resolve cases and report back to DHCS if more is needed.

4. Contact Western Center.

Western Center believes that 1) the state is violating both state and federal law by not processing cases within 45 days, 2) the state could take more drastic steps to clear the backlog but is choosing not to, and 3) people are being harmed because of the state's decisions. If you have clients who are willing to share their experience in applying for Medi-Cal and any harms they have suffered while waiting, please contact Jen Flory at jflory@wclp.org or 916-282-5141.