

Settlement Protects Hundreds of Thousands Each Month from Potential Loss of Medi-Cal

The state will no longer terminate eligible recipients without sending translated forms and complete information, ending practices that cost countless beneficiaries their critical healthcare

LOS ANGELES, CA – Before advocacy organizations sued the state in 2014, hundreds of thousands of termination notices were sent out each month informing Medi-Cal recipients across California they would lose their healthcare because they failed to complete renewal forms. But many of those being terminated had no way of knowing they had to complete the forms, which the state failed to translate into the primary languages spoken by many Californians. The state’s forms—already some of the most confusing in the nation—were incomprehensible to many recipients.

“The process was so broken it seemed as though the intention was to push beneficiaries off of Medi-Cal,” said Helen Tran, an attorney with Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County who represents the plaintiffs. “Not only were people terminated without proper notice, they were also never told that they had 90 days to rectify the situation and restore their benefits without having to reapply.”

A coalition of legal services groups sued the state to improve the process and prevent wrongful terminations. Plaintiffs in the lawsuit included organizations serving impacted communities.

“So many people were calling us for help after learning they had lost their coverage when they were denied care at the doctor’s office or clinic or dialysis center,” said Jenny Seon, whose organization—the Korean Resource Center—served as a plaintiff in the case.

A settlement earlier this month helps ensure significantly improved renewal forms and other critical notices that go out to Medi-Cal beneficiaries, requires translation of this information into the state’s 11 most prevalent non-English languages, and ensures recipients are informed of their right to restore their benefits.

“We are pleased that the state has agreed to these basic protocols,” said plaintiffs’ attorney Cori Racela of Western Center on Law & Poverty. “Now, when a person gets a Medi-Cal termination notice, they are told what eligibility information is missing, about their right to reinstate Medi-Cal, and—if the person’s primary language is Arabic, Armenian, Cambodian, Chinese, Farsi, Hmong, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, or Vietnamese—they get this critical information in that language.”

The coalition of legal groups—including the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Kirkland and Ellis LLP, Bay Area Legal Aid, and Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles, and the National Health Law Program—brought the lawsuit on behalf of nonprofit organizations that help people with limited English proficiency access their health benefits. The Korean Community Center of the East Bay and the Los Angeles-based Korean Resource Center were seeing an influx of people who were shocked to learn they no longer had healthcare benefits.

“We were getting so many calls from people with serious medical needs,” said June Lee from the Korean Community Center of the East Bay.

People receiving termination notices who need assistance should contact their local legal aid program at 1-888-804 3536.

* * *