



TO: Will Lightbourne, Director, California Department of Health Care Services; Mark Ghaly, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency

FROM: Levi Deatherage and Jevon Wilkes

SUBJECT: The Essential Role of Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans (MCPs) in Improving Youth Mental Health and Well-Being (DHCS RFI # 20-001)

DATE: October 1, 2020

My name is Levi and I am working with The California Coalition for Youth (CCY) to submit these comments in response to the Medi-Cal Managed Care Plan (MCP) Request for Information (RFI # 20-001) led by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS). CCY is a thirty-eight-year-old grassroots non-profit organization located in Sacramento that, as a statewide coalition, takes positions on and advocates for public policies, programs and services that empower and improve the lives of all California's youth ages 12-24, with a strong focus on disconnected, runaway and homeless youth.

I have a lot to say about the health plans and how they could help me and my peers.

Youth struggle to get access to services. Sometimes, they don't even know what plan they are enrolled in, who their primary care physician is, let alone how to complete some of the paperwork that goes with it. The barriers to accessing services needs to be addressed and made to be friendlier for youth who don't have a trusted person to turn to in order to navigate the complex systems, which leads them to using emergency rooms or free clinics. Health plans get a lot of money. The more I have learned about how important health plans are in California, the more I want to make sure they do things that matter for the young people I serve.

The promise our government makes to young people on Medi-Cal, especially youth who are experiencing homelessness, is not being kept. This has to change.

Mandate that MCP's:

- Partner with services in schools to reach young people.
- Partner and require schools (K12 and higher education institutions) to provide 30 minutes of their orientations to express health benefits to their students.
- Require partnerships with homeless youth providers to provide on-site services for the youth – from comprehensive primary care, sexual health services, confidential HIV prevention and testing, behavioral health services (including individual and group therapy) and more.
- Fund street outreach – including providing licensed clinical staff who can provide immediate mental health, life skills, and social-emotional needs assessments.
- Invest in Peer to Peer Programs.
- Fund prevention services so that we can get support before we are in crisis.
- Allow for teletherapy and family-centered services for children with severe emotional disturbance diagnosis.

- Make it easier for youth to be able to transfer plans when they move to a new county. This could also include making it easier for youth under 26 to be treated like former foster youth in Medi-Cal by coding them under "Fee For Service" to make it easier for them to access services.
- Ensure that MCPs have substance use treatment programs specifically available for youth in their service area.
- Include us in evaluating if the services we get are good or matter.

The California Coalition for Youth and I urge DHCS to focus on these issues in addressing the overall health, and mental health in particular, of children and youth. Mandating inclusion of the youth perspective and voice in MCP contracts, especially to inform MCP partnerships with community-based organizations and schools, is a critical first step.