

Governor Baker files Medicaid waiver for MassHealth flexibility

Governor Baker yesterday announced new federal waiver requests to provide the state's MassHealth program with more flexibility to respond to COVID-19, and provided an update on Massachusetts' successful implementation of the new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program.

MassHealth Waiver Requests: Massachusetts is filing two waiver requests with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) that will give the state and its Medicaid program, MassHealth, more flexibility to respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency. If allowed, the waivers will build upon the two previously submitted waivers and enable MassHealth to deliver the most effective care to its members and support health care providers.

Through these waiver requests, the Commonwealth is seeking flexibility to address key areas of need:

Expand Medicare telehealth coverage to include services provided by phone and video, to increase access to health care for seniors and individuals with disabilities without readily accessible video technology. This expansion is consistent with telehealth coverage currently provided by MassHealth and commercial plans.

Allow MassHealth to waive the requirement that certain applicants and members spend down to qualify for coverage in cases of financial hardship.

Extend retroactive coverage for individuals who qualify for MassHealth to allow individuals to be covered up to 90 days prior to submitting their application.

Provide flexibility for federal provider payment limits to enable MassHealth to provide critical stabilization funds to health care providers.

Ease provider requirements that could result in unnecessary administrative burdens or barriers to care.

PUA Unemployment System Launch: Earlier this week, Massachusetts became one of the first states in the nation to successfully implement the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program established by the federal CARES Act. This program provides benefits for individuals who do not qualify for traditional unemployment benefits, but have lost their jobs due to COVID-19.

The platform launched on April 20, 10 days ahead of the previously scheduled launch date. Since then, the PUA system has so far processed well over 100,000 claims, and benefit checks, which include an additional \$600 as part of another federal CARES Act benefit implemented by the administration, are already being issued.

Visit www.mass.gov/pua to learn more and apply.