



JENNIFER KENT  
DIRECTOR

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency  
Department of Health Care Services



GAVIN NEWSOM  
GOVERNOR

**DATE:** January 17, 2019

ALL PLAN LETTER 19-001

**TO:** ALL MEDI-CAL MANAGED CARE HEALTH PLANS

**SUBJECT:** MEDI-CAL MANAGED CARE HEALTH PLAN GUIDANCE ON NETWORK PROVIDER STATUS

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this All Plan Letter (APL) is to provide guidance to Medi-Cal managed care health plans (MCPs) regarding how the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) evaluates Network Provider status in order to promote consistency between federal regulations, Medi-Cal managed care contracts, state law, APLs, and similar instructions. It is the general intention of DHCS to apply this policy related to Network Provider contracting requirements in a standardized manner, to the extent appropriate, across relevant contexts, including MCP Network Provider and Subcontractor agreements, provider directory reporting, network adequacy certification, and directed payments pursuant to Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 438.6(c).<sup>1</sup>

**BACKGROUND:**

In May 2016, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released the Final Rule in the Federal Register applicable to Medicaid managed care programs (Final Rule).<sup>2</sup> The Final Rule did not eliminate or weaken any of the existing requirements found in the current Medi-Cal managed care contract, but rather updated the managed care regulations to include new and expanded requirements for MCP Subcontractors and separately defined Network Providers.<sup>3</sup> In implementing the Final Rule, DHCS submitted contract amendments to CMS to bring its existing provisions related to "Subcontracts" into compliance with the new and more stringent federal requirements.<sup>4</sup> As of now, and consistent with historical practice and Title 22 of the California Code of

<sup>1</sup> 42 CFR, Part 438 is available at: <https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=1e1bce051e31df7ab188a92eff8209bf&mc=true&node=pt42.4.438&rqn=div5>

<sup>2</sup> See Federal Register Volume 81, Issue 88 (May 6, 2016), available at: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-05-06/pdf/2016-09581.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See 42 CFR 438.2, "Definitions."

<sup>4</sup> Note that references to contract provisions in this document reflect changes made by the 2017 Final Rule amendment (identified as Package 42, an updated version of which was shared with MCPs in January 2018). To date the amendment is pending approval by CMS, and is anticipated to be finalized with minimal changes.

Regulations (CCR) Section 53250,<sup>5</sup> DHCS is maintaining uniformity to the extent appropriate with respect to the requirements for all "Subcontracts," regardless of whether the agreement is between an MCP and an entity defined as a "Subcontractor" or "Network Provider" under 42 CFR Section 438.2.<sup>6</sup>

While the guidance in this APL on how DHCS will evaluate compliance is prospective, many of these obligations were imposed as of July 1, 2017, in accordance with the Final Rule.

Additional guidance on what constitutes an eligible Network Provider for directed payment programs is set forth on the DHCS Directed Payments web page.<sup>7</sup>

**POLICY:**

**I. Required Characteristics of Network Providers**

Effective on or after July 1, 2019, a Network Provider, as defined in 42 CFR Section 438.2 and the Medi-Cal managed care contract in Exhibit E, Attachment 1, Definitions, must:

1. Have an executed written Network Provider Agreement with the MCP or a Subcontractor of the MCP that meets all the requirements set forth in Attachment A of to this APL;
2. Be enrolled in accordance with APL 17-019,<sup>8</sup> the Medi-Cal Managed Care Provider Enrollment Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document, or any subsequent APL or FAQ update on the topic, unless enrollment is not required as specified by DHCS;
3. Be reported on the MCP's 274 file submitted to DHCS, for all applicable filings, in accordance with APL 16-019 or any subsequent APL on the topic and the most recent DHCS 274 Companion Guide; and

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<sup>5</sup> The CCR is searchable at: <https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs/Search/Index>

<sup>6</sup> The Medi-Cal managed care contract defines the term Subcontract to include both Subcontractors and Network Providers (as those terms are defined under 42 CFR Section 438.2), and all requirements listed in Paragraph B of Provision 14 of Exhibit A, Attachment 6 apply to Network Providers. A provider may maintain Network Provider status without an agreement directly with an MCP, if they are connected through a series of Subcontracts, so long as those Subcontracts also meet all applicable state and federal law and contract requirements as well as DHCS guidance, including all applicable APLs and Policy Letters (PLs), in particular, but not limited to, those requirements in Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14 and APL 17-004 (or any subsequent APL on the topic). That chain of Subcontracts may include an entity that is also a Network Provider, who, as a result of taking on an administrative function of contracting for care (and not providing that care itself), also meets the definition of a "Subcontractor."

<sup>7</sup> The DHCS directed payment web page is available at:

<https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/Pages/DirectedPymts.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> APLs are available at: <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/formsandpubs/Pages/AllPlanLetters.aspx>

4. Be included on all network adequacy filings that occur within the effective dates of the written Network Provider Agreement, in accordance with APL 18-005, or any subsequent APL on the topic, following the execution of the agreement. This does not automatically require the provider to be listed on a provider directory, nor does it require the inclusion of a Network Provider on network adequacy filings if such inclusion would be inappropriate due to timing or other circumstances, as discussed in APL 18-005.

For contract/rating periods commencing on or after July 1, 2019, when DHCS references Network Providers in guidance, information, instruction, or communications, it will refer to providers who meet the criteria outlined in this APL, unless expressly noted otherwise. MCPs must use the guidance provided in this APL and the checklist provided in Attachment A to update current Network Provider Agreement boilerplates for compliance before submitting to DHCS for review and approval. Note that this APL, including its attachment, is not an exhaustive list of all MCP duties related to Network Providers, and it is not intended to alter or limit an MCP's statutory and/or contractual obligations, nor does it limit an MCP's oversight obligations. MCPs are responsible for complying with all applicable state and federal law and contract requirements as well as DHCS guidance, including all applicable APLs and PLs.

A provider that does not meet the criteria for a Network Provider shall not be reported on the 274 file or as part of the MCP's network adequacy filings.

## **II. Written Network Provider Agreement Requirements**

In order to ensure alignment with the DHCS criteria for Network Providers across applicable settings, all MCPs must ensure that their Network Provider Agreements comply with current and applicable Medi-Cal managed care contract requirements.

In accordance with the current Medi-Cal managed care contracts and 22 CCR Section 53250, all Network Provider Agreement boilerplates must be submitted to DHCS for review and approval before use. A checklist of the required elements for these agreements is included as Attachment A of this APL. Where an MCP's relationship with a Network Provider includes one or more sub-delegated entities or a hospital to hospital agreement, each Subcontractor agreement that links the MCP to the Network Provider must also comply with all applicable state and federal law and contract requirements as well as DHCS guidance, including all applicable APLs and PLs, in particular, but not limited to, those in Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14 and APL 17-004 (or any subsequent APL on the topic).

**III. DHCS Review and Approval of Network Provider Agreement Boilerplate Compliance**

As stated above, MCPs are required to submit Network Provider Agreement boilerplates that have been updated in accordance with the requirements in this APL to DHCS for review and approval prior to use. MCPs are also responsible for complying with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations, contract requirements, and other DHCS guidance, including APLs and PLs, as they relate to Network Provider requirements and Network Provider Agreements.

MCPs will have 60 days from the release date of this APL to submit updated Network Provider Agreement boilerplates for hospital providers and 120 days from the release date of this APL to submit updated Network Provider Agreement boilerplates for non-hospital providers to their DHCS contract manager.

The timing for DHCS to review these Network Provider Agreement boilerplates will follow the current 60-day review timing requirements as outlined in the Medi-Cal managed care contract under Exhibit E, Attachment 3, Duties of the State, DHCS Approval Process.

If an MCP has a timing issue that would require a Network Provider Agreement boilerplate to be approved for use by DHCS sooner than the 60-day review period would allow, the MCP must notify its DHCS Contract Manager to arrange an alternate timing agreement.

**IV. Directed Payment Impacts**

All MCPs must comply with the terms of all directed payments approved by CMS in accordance with 42 CFR Section 438.6(c), as documented in CMS-approved preprints, state law, and/or as implemented by DHCS through APL or other similar guidance. All such guidance is available at the DHCS Directed Payments web page. If a Network Provider Agreement does not meet the Network Provider criteria set forth in this APL and/or in DHCS guidance regarding directed payments, the services provided under that agreement will not be eligible for directed payments for rating periods commencing on or after July 1, 2019. For pooled directed payments where DHCS retrospectively calculates final payments based on the actual reported utilization of eligible services, MCPs must continue to provide supplemental encounter/service-level data, in a manner and at times specified by DHCS. This information will aid in identifying the subset of services provided under a Network Provider Agreement that meet the Network Provider criteria set forth in this APL and/or in DHCS guidance regarding directed payments.

MCPs are responsible for ensuring that their delegates comply with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations, contract requirements, and other DHCS guidance, including APLs and PLs. These requirements must be communicated by each MCP to all delegated entities and subcontractors.

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If you have any questions regarding this APL, please contact your Managed Care Operations Division Contract Manager.

Sincerely,

Original signed by Nathan Nau

Nathan Nau, Chief  
Managed Care Quality and Monitoring Division

Attachment(s)

**Attachment A: Network Provider Agreement Boilerplate Checklist**

This Attachment establishes a checklist for MCPs to use in connection with their development of Network Provider Agreement templates. It is not intended to alter or limit an MCP's statutory and/or contractual obligations, nor does it limit an MCP's oversight obligations. MCPs are responsible for complying with all applicable state and federal law and contract requirements as well as DHCS guidance, including all applicable All Plan Letters and Policy Letters.

<b>Network Provider Agreements must contain:</b>	
1	Specification of the services to be provided by the Network Provider. Citation: Managed Care Plan Contract (MCP Contract), Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.1 and Title 22, CCR, Sections 53250(c)(1) and 53867. <sup>1</sup>
2	Specification that the Network Provider Agreement must be governed by and construed in accordance with all laws and applicable regulations governing the Contract between Contractor and DHCS. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.2 and Title 22, CCR, Sections 53250(c)(2) and 53867.
3	Specification that the Network Provider Agreement or its amendments will become effective only as set forth in Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 13.C. Departmental Approval – Non-Federally Qualified HMOs, or 13.D, Departmental Approval – Federally Qualified HMOs. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.3 and Title 22, CCR, Sections 53250(c)(3) and 53867.
4	Specification of the term of the Network Provider Agreement, including beginning and ending dates, methods of extension, renegotiation, and termination. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.4 and Title 22, CCR, Sections 53250(c)(4) and 53867.
5	Language comparable to Exhibit A, Attachment 8, Provision 13. Contracting & Non-Contracting Emergency Service Providers & Post-Stabilization, for those Network Providers at risk for non-contracting emergency services. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.5.
6	Network Provider's agreement to submit reports as required by Contractor. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.6, Exhibit A, Attachment 3, Provision 2.C and 2.G, and Title 22, CCR, Sections 53250(c)(5) and 53867.

<sup>1</sup> Note that references to contract provisions in this document reflect changes made by the 2017 Final Rule amendment (identified as Package 42, an updated version of which was shared with MCPs in January 2018). To date, the amendment is pending approval by CMS and is anticipated to be finalized with minimal changes.

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7	<p>Specification that the Network Provider must comply with all monitoring provisions of the MCPs' contracts and any monitoring requests by DHCS. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.7, 42 CFR 438.3(h), and Title 22, CCR, Sections 53250(e)(1) and 53867.</p>
8	<p>Network Provider's agreement to make all of its premises, facilities, equipment, books, records, contracts, computer and other electronic systems pertaining to the goods and services furnished under the terms of the Network Provider Agreement, available for the purpose of an audit, inspection, evaluation, examination or copying, including but not limited to Access Requirements and State's Right to Monitor, as set forth in Exhibit E, Attachment 2, Provision 20. Inspection Rights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) By DHCS, CMS, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Inspector General, the Comptroller General, Department of Justice (DOJ), and Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC), or their designees.</li> <li>b) At all reasonable times at the Network Provider's place of business or at such other mutually agreeable location in California.</li> <li>c) In a form maintained in accordance with the general standards applicable to such book or record keeping.</li> <li>d) For a term of at least ten (10) years from the final date of the Contract period or from the date of completion of any audit, whichever is later.</li> <li>e) Including all Encounter Data for a period of at least ten (10) years.</li> <li>f) If DHCS, CMS, or the DHHS Inspector General determines there is a reasonable possibility of fraud or similar risk, DHCS, CMS, or the DHHS Inspector General may inspect, evaluate, and audit the Network Provider at any time.</li> <li>g) Upon resolution of a full investigation of fraud, DHCS reserves the right to suspend or terminate the Network Provider from participation in the Medi-Cal program; seek recovery of payments made to the Network Provider; impose other sanctions provided under the State Plan, and direct Contractor to terminate their Network Provider Agreement due to fraud.</li> </ul> <p>Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.8, Exhibit E, Attachment 2, Provision 20, and 42 CFR 438.3(h).</p>

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9	<p>Full disclosure of the method and amount of compensation or other consideration to be received by the Network Provider. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.9 and Title 22, CCR, Sections 53250(e)(2) and 53867.</p>
10	<p>Network Provider's agreement to maintain and make available to DHCS, upon request, copies of all sub-subcontracts and to ensure that all sub-subcontracts are in writing and require that the Network Provider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Make all premises, facilities, equipment, applicable books, records, contracts, computer, or other electronic systems related to this Contract, available at all reasonable times for audit, inspection, examination, or copying by DHCS, CMS, or the DHHS Inspector General, the Comptroller General, DOJ, and DMHC, or their designees.</li> <li>b) Retain such books and all records and documents for a term minimum of at least ten (10) years from the final date of the Contract period or from the date of completion of any audit, whichever is later.</li> </ul> <p>Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.10.</p>
11	<p>Network Provider's agreement to assist Contractor in the transfer of care pursuant to Exhibit E, Attachment 2, Provision 14. Phase out Requirements, Subparagraph B in the event of contract termination. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.11.</p>
12	<p>Network Provider's agreement to assist Contractor in the transfer of care in the event of sub-subcontract termination for any reason. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.12.</p>
13	<p>Network Provider's agreement to notify DHCS in the event the agreement with the Contractor is amended or terminated. Notice is considered given when properly addressed and deposited in the United States Postal Service as first-class registered mail, postage attached. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.13 and Title 22, CCR, Sections 53250(e)(4) and 53867.</p>
14	<p>Network Provider's agreement that assignment or delegation of the Network Provider Agreement or Subcontract will be void unless prior written approval is obtained from DHCS. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.14 and Title 22, CCR, Sections 53250(e)(5) and 53867.</p>
15	<p>Network Provider's agreement to hold harmless both the State and Members in the event Contractor cannot or will not pay for services performed by the Network Provider pursuant to the Network Provider Agreement. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.15 and Title 22, CCR, Sections 53250(e)(6) and 53867.</p>



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Attachment A

16	<p>Network Provider's agreement to timely gather, preserve and provide to DHCS, any records in the Network Provider's possession, in accordance with Exhibit E, Attachment 2, Provision 24. Records Related to Recovery for Litigation. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.16.</p>
17	<p>Network Provider's agreement to provide interpreter services for Members at all Provider sites. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.17.</p>
18	<p>Network Provider's right to submit a grievance and Contractor's formal process to resolve Provider Grievances. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.18.</p>
19	<p>Network Provider's agreement to participate and cooperate in Contractor's Quality Improvement System. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.19.</p>
20	<p>If Contractor delegates Quality Improvement activities, the Network Provider Agreement must include those provisions stipulated in Exhibit A, Attachment 4, Provision 6. Delegation of Quality Improvement Activities.</p> <p>Contractor and delegated entity (Network Provider) must include in their Network Provider Agreement, at minimum:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Quality improvement responsibilities, and specific delegated functions and activities of the Contractor and Network Provider.</li> <li>2) Contractor's oversight, monitoring, and evaluation processes and Network Provider's agreement to such processes.</li> <li>3) Contractor's reporting requirements and approval processes. The agreement must include Network Provider's responsibility to report findings and actions taken as a result of the quality improvement activities at least quarterly.</li> <li>4) Contractor's actions/remedies if Network Provider's obligations are not met.</li> </ol> <p>Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.20 and Exhibit A, Attachment 4, Provision 6.A.</p>
21	<p>Network Provider's agreement to comply with all applicable requirements of the DHCS, Medi-Cal Managed Care Program. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.21.</p>
22	<p>Network Provider's agreement to revoke the delegation of activities or obligations, or specify other remedies in instances where DHCS or Contractor determine that the Network Provider has not performed satisfactorily. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.22, 42 CFR 438.230(c)(iii), and Title 22, CCR, Sections 53250 and 53867.</p>

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23	To the extent that the Network Provider is responsible for the coordination of care for Members, Contractor's agreement to share with the Network Provider any utilization data that DHCS has provided to Contractor, and the Network Provider's agreement to receive the utilization data provided and use it as the Network Provider is able for the purpose of Member care coordination. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.23 and 42 CFR 438.208.
24	Contractor's agreement to inform the Network Provider of prospective requirements added by DHCS to Contractor's Contract with DHCS before the requirement would be effective, and Network Provider's agreement to comply with the new requirements within 30 days of the effective date, unless otherwise instructed by DHCS and to the extent possible. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 6, Provision 14.B.24.
25	A provision requiring Network Providers to submit to Contractor complete, accurate, reasonable, and timely provider data needed by Contractor in order for Contractor to meet its provider data reporting requirements to DHCS. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 3, Provision 1; APL 16-019, and any subsequent updates.
26	A provision requiring Network Providers to submit to Contractor complete, accurate, reasonable, and timely Encounter Data needed by Contractor in order for Contractor to meet its encounter data reporting requirements to DHCS. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 3, Provisions 2.C and 2.G.; APL 14-019, and any subsequent updates.
27	A provision prohibiting Network Providers from balance billing a Medi-Cal member. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 8, Provision 6.
28	A provision stating that Contractor will provide cultural competency, sensitivity, and diversity training. Citation: MCP Contract, Exhibit A, Attachment 9, Provision 13.E.
29	A provision confirming a Network Provider's right to access Contractor's dispute resolution mechanism. Citation: Health & Safety Code §1367 (h)(1).
30	A provision requiring that Network Providers comply with language assistance standards developed pursuant to Health & Safety Code §1367.04.
31	A provision confirming that Network Providers are entitled to all protections afforded them under the Health Care Providers' Bill of Rights. Citation: Health & Safety Code §1375.7