

Dear DHCS Stakeholders,

DHCS is receiving many questions asking for clarification as to what constitutes an “essential workforce” during this COVID-19 State of Emergency. To help answer those questions we’ve gathered some important information from the state’s [COVID-19 information center](#), a key part of the state’s effort to protect and inform ourselves and our communities during the COVID-19 emergency.

The Healthcare and Public Health (HPH) Sector is important and vast, ranging from large-scale health care facilities, and local physicians’ offices, to our state supported behavioral health providers. All of them, large and small, are parts of our essential workforce – which is more critical now than perhaps ever before, as we work together against COVID-19.

Officially called Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers, these essential individuals are the workers now providing COVID-19 testing, the psychologists who are counseling those in distress, the nurses providing care and advice, infection control personnel, pharmacists, and more. The nature of an emergency requires that virtually everyone, ranging from the staff who provide administrative support to the leader of a hospital, be available to provide essential support during an incident such as the COVID-19 emergency.

As such, these essential workforce members are deemed necessary to maintain the continuity of operations in the Healthcare and Public Health Sector. Because of that “necessary” designation, when they are supporting essential critical infrastructure sectors, like health care, they are not subject to the State’s public health directives to stay at home.

DHCS, whose workers are also a part of the essential workforce, is closely following all state guidance and directives. For example, we are encouraging employees to take recommended safety precautions and to work remotely, using technology such as telehealth wherever possible. DHCS also encourages other health care partners supporting the COVID-19 effort to take protective measures and use telehealth whenever appropriate. To support these telehealth recommendations, DHCS has provided flexibility around reimbursement for virtual care by health care providers. For details, see our [COVID-19 Response website](#), which is frequently updated with guidance related to telehealth and other COVID-19 questions.

Finally, to ensure services are available for those most in need, DHCS also encourages triage and prioritization, including delaying or canceling routine/non-urgent care to make capacity for those needing urgent help.

Thank you,  
DHCS



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**NUMBER:** 20-02  
**DATE:** March 24, 2020

**CONTACT:** Norman Williams  
(916) 440-7660  
[www.dhcs.ca.gov](http://www.dhcs.ca.gov)

## **FEDERAL HEALTH OFFICIALS APPROVE CHANGES TO SPEED CALIFORNIA'S EFFORTS AGAINST COVID- 19**

**SACRAMENTO** – The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) on Monday approved rule changes sought under an 1135 waiver request that will enable the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) to more effectively and efficiently deliver care to Californians covered by Medi-Cal during the COVID-19 emergency.

The changes approved included significant items requested by DHCS that will speed care to those who need it:

- More flexibility in allowing out-of-state doctors and other medical providers to treat California patients, both in person and through telehealth.
- Changes to allow for efficient use of hospital capacity and shift patients to appropriate care settings, maximizing the state's ability to treat those in need.
- Modifications to prior authorization rules on treatment and the establishment of medical necessity, enabling the health care system to more quickly respond to the rapidly evolving situation.

"We are tremendously pleased that CMS responded so quickly to our request," said Jacey Cooper, California's State Medicaid Director. "CMS is still reviewing California's remaining 1135 requests and we look forward to working closely with them to receive approval of the pending items that will help our state meet the challenge posed by COVID-19."

DHCS will provide information to stakeholders as soon as possible about the pending 1135 waiver requests once CMS decides whether to approve them.

DHCS requested a series of rule waivers on [March 16](#) and [March 19](#) under Section 1135 of the Social Security Act, used to provide flexibility during national health emergencies. Portions of California's requests were granted by CMS in a [March 23, 2020, letter](#).

"We will be rolling out guidance to our provider partners by March 26 so they can quickly take advantage of this new flexibility to provide high-quality health care to the Californians we serve through the Medi-Cal system," said Cooper.

DHCS administers Medi-Cal, California's version of Medicaid, providing health coverage to about 13 million people.