



Dear Partners,

First and foremost, we'd like to thank you for the care you provide to all Coloradans, including Health First Colorado (Colorado's Medicaid Program) and Child Health Plan *Plus* (CHP+) members. We are deeply appreciative of what you do every day.

As the spread of and response to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) evolves, the Department of Health Care Policy & Financing (the Department) acknowledges that many of our partners are devoting all available resources to COVID-19 pandemic readiness and care delivery.

We have received requests from partners on the front lines, including the Colorado Hospital Association and UHealth, to delay implementation of non-COVID-19 related programs at this critical time. In response to these requests and after reviewing our Department's own capacity, and after receiving input from CMS on their waiver capacity due to the states' COVID-19 related waivers, we have made the difficult decision to delay the effective date of the Substance Use Disorder (SUD) benefits intended through House Bill 18-1136 until January 2021.

The Department and its partners are facing unanticipated challenges in standing up a new residential treatment benefit during a pandemic. Social distancing measures are crucial to combat COVID-19, and we must give this careful consideration as we implement SUD treatment in a residential setting. The Department also recognizes the significant resources required for providers to coordinate and start this benefit during a pandemic.

This six-month delay will enable us to free up capacity and budget for both the Department and our partners to respond to the current public health crisis caused by COVID-19. The additional time will also allow the Regional Accountable Entities (RAEs) to focus on current health care needs and avoid the administrative burden and fiscal uncertainty created by implementing a new benefit in the midst of the current COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, this delay will enable the Department, providers, and RAEs to better integrate this implementation effort with other statewide efforts, including the work of the Behavioral Health Task Force.

We remain fully committed to working with our partners to implement this critical and valued inpatient and residential benefit, to be added to the continuum of outpatient SUD services currently available to Health First Colorado members. Specifically, the Department currently covers a full range of outpatient SUD benefits for individuals with substance use disorders and/or co-occurring mental health diagnoses. The continuum of services ranges from initial assessment and screening to intensive outpatient programs. Specific services include:

- SUD assessment
- Alcohol/drug screen counseling
- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- Targeted case management
- Medication assisted treatment
- Intensive outpatient treatment
- Social ambulatory detoxification services

Note that during this critical time, we have enhanced provider access and spread protections through the expansion of telemedicine, including for behavioral health care. For more information, please see our fact sheet on [Behavioral Health Services during COVID-19 State of Emergency](#).

We invite you to maximize this six-month delay to continue planning for and improving the implementation of this important benefit expansion, in collaboration with the Department and all partners to the benefit of Health First Colorado members. More information on SUD benefits is available on the [Ensuring a Full Continuum of SUD Benefits web page](#).

Sincerely,

Kim Bimestefer
Executive Director
Department of Health Care Policy & Financing

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