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Medi-Cal's Non-Medical Transportation Benefit Under a New State Law

What is it? “Non-medical transportation” is transportation to and from a doctor’s visit, a pharmacy, or medical supplier to pick up prescriptions or medical equipment or devices, to attend to a sick baby in the NICU, or to receive any other Medi-Cal-covered service, including mental health and dental.

Medi-Cal now covers this transportation for beneficiaries who do not have and cannot get transportation on their own. See Welf. & Inst. C. § 14132(ad). Transportation includes, at a minimum, round trip rides for a beneficiary to obtain covered Medi-Cal services by passenger car, taxicab, or any other form of public or private conveyance, and mileage reimbursement. Bus tokens or passes, taxi vouchers, train tickets and similar can also be used.

This “non-medical” transportation differs from and is in addition to “medical transportation”, like paratransit or a litter van for people unable to use private or other public transportation. It is also in addition to ambulance service and other emergency transportation.

Who qualifies for Non-Medical Transportation? All Medi-Cal beneficiaries, regardless of whether the person is in a health plan or “regular” (fee-for-service) Medi-Cal, who lack other transportation to reach a Medi-Cal-covered service, and who do not require medical assistance with transport.

Transportation is also covered for one person to go with the Medi-Cal beneficiary when necessary, such as an attendant to accompany an elderly person or a parent to take her child to the doctor. Parents can authorize teens to receive Medi-Cal transportation assistance on their own. But when parental consent is not required, for the Medi-Cal service, such as for Minor Consent program services, transportation must be provided without a parent’s consent.

For Medi-Cal health plan members

For Medi-Cal beneficiaries enrolled in managed care, the state has instructed the health plans to provide non-medical transportation to plan services. Plans must also arrange transportation to “carved out” services, such as dental and specialty mental health, starting October 1, 2017, with best efforts to refer and coordinate transportation to the carve-outs in the meantime. See [All Plan Letter No. 17-010 \(July 17, 2017\)](#).

➤ How do plan members get non-medical transportation?

- Plan members should be able to get non-medical transportation by calling or e-mailing Member Services.

- But, at present, many of the plans seem to require a plan provider to make the request, using a form to certify that the transportation is needed.
- MCHA is working to change this, so that no form is required and no provider has to certify the need for non-medical transportation.

The Member Services phone numbers for the request process for Los Angeles Medi-Cal plans, along with the forms we have been able to gather so far are on MCHA's website. **Reminder:** Instead of using a form with a physician or other provider's certification, you should be able to just call or email Member Services to request non-medical transportation. We are working to get a system like that set up. If you come across barriers, please let us know by contacting MCHA: (213) 749-4261.

- **How many rides? Duration? How long does the request last?** There shouldn't be any limitation on the distance or time for the travel or how many times non-medical transportation may be used so long as the person continues to be eligible for Medi-Cal and they lack other transportation to a medically necessary service covered by Medi-Cal.

MCH Access and other advocates have asked the state to make it clear to all of the plans that limitations are not permitted, as many have been imposed in the past, such as "no rides over 25 miles, no more than three rides a month", and similar. If you come across barriers or other limitations, please let us know by contacting MCHA: (213) 749-4261.

For Medi-Cal fee-for-service beneficiaries

The implementation of non-medical transportation services for "regular" or fee-for-service beneficiaries presents a different picture.

The state says consumers and providers should turn to local county agencies to provide the service through the Medi-Cal Administrative Assistance (MAA) program and has directed consumer advocates to [a list of local contacts](#) (last updated August 24, 2017).

However, very little transportation service is provided through these agencies.

The gaps mainly affect pregnant women, foster children, seniors, and people with disabilities, as these groups are not always required to enroll into a Medi-Cal managed care plan. The lack of transportation services for this population can be very dangerous. Emergency helicopter evacuation from Santa Rosa became necessary for a high-risk pregnant woman who was MCHA referred to a specialist in San Francisco but lacked a way to travel there; the airlift cost far more than the bus ticket would have, and the life-threatening, preventable medical emergency was utterly devastating to the woman and her newborn.

We continue to discuss the gap in non-medical transportation in Medi-Cal's fee-for-service program with the state. Please let us know of any issues you are having with accessing transportation for a fee-for-service Medi-Cal beneficiary by contacting MCHA: 213-749-4261.