

Medicaid Matters

Medicaid Commissioner presents FY2009 budget to state legislators

Alabama Medicaid Commissioner Carol Steckel urged members of the state's legislative budget committee to support the Agency's efforts to build a firm foundation for the Agency's future so that innovations in technology and medicine can be used to provide better health care at a lower cost. Her comments came during her annual presentation to members of the state legislative budget committee on January 16.

"Historically it has been our mission to pay claims correctly and timely. Now, we are in a select group of state Medicaid programs chosen to lead a national transformation effort to move beyond just paying claims correctly to using technological know-how, national health care guidelines and the power of collaboration to create a health care system that is driven by information, accountability and results," she said.

Commissioner Steckel presented the Agency's FY09 budget proposal which requests an additional \$149.6 million from the state's General Fund Budget. The proposed budget reflects a loss of \$111 million state dollars in one time funds from Hurricane Katrina relief and the loss of one-time revenues from Upper Payment Limit cost settlements.

The budget also includes several pharmacy program initiatives designed to preserve recipients' access to medically-necessary drugs while reducing costs to the Medicaid program, she said. These include newly-implemented revisions to the criteria and payment methodology for hemophilia blood products, a positive antipsychotic management program, improvements to dispense-as-written requirements, elimination of adult coverage of generic and over-the-counter drugs for cough and cold symptoms and a return to the monthly 4-brand drug limit. The proposed changes also include a plan to modify the State Maximum Allowable Cost (SMAC) program.

"We are currently working in cooperation with our pharmacy providers to implement a new reimbursement system for pharmacy services and prescription drugs," Commissioner Steckel said.

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Medicaid Commissioner Carol Steckel continued her tradition of inviting students who are interested in government to attend the January 16 Medicaid budget presentation to the legislative budget committee. Following the presentation, the five students toured the Statehouse and met members of the Legislature. From left to right are Caryn Bradford of Montgomery, Shannen Miller of Geneva, Brandon Hurst and DeLorenzo Watkins of Montgomery, and Brandon Perez of Millbrook with Speaker of the House Seth Hammett and Commissioner Steckel.



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New claims payment system implementation set for February 23

Alabama Medicaid is taking final steps to implement interChange, the new Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS) to process and pay provider claims, on Saturday, February 23.

The new system is designed to provide timely, cost-effective modifications resulting from the changing healthcare delivery market and variation in state health care purchasing strategies, according to MMIS Coordinator and Privacy Officer Paul Brannan.

“This is consistent with the national efforts going forward related to Medicaid reform, health information technology, electronic medical records systems, and MITA, a new federal mandate designed to promote flexibility in Medicaid claims processing systems,” he said. “This new MMIS has been so well received that it is currently being installed in seven other states.”

The improved system is designed to support continued compliance with HIPAA requirements and to respond effectively to enhancements required by providers, state staff, and fiscal agent personnel.

“Any future enhancements designed to improve the efficiency and convenience of the system for providers, state staff, and fiscal agent personnel can be readily implemented as a result of the flexible system design. This will allow us to focus on healthcare outcomes for our recipients, not the complexities and limitations of our MMIS,” Brannan said.

Medicaid, providers collaborate to meet TRPP mandate deadline

Collaborative efforts between the Alabama Medicaid Agency and state health care providers are now underway to meet an April 1 deadline for use of tamper-resistant prescription paper for certain prescriptions provided to Medicaid recipients. In FY 2006, a total of 8.5 million written or electronic prescriptions were filled for Alabama Medicaid recipients.

Passed by Congress in May 2007, the new federal law requires all written, non-electronic outpatient prescriptions issued to Medicaid recipients must be written on prescription paper with at least one tamper-resistant characteristic beginning April 1, 2008. Providers have until October 1, 2008, to obtain specialty prescription pads with the three required tamper-resistant characteristics.

“While I support prevention of fraud and abuse within the Medicaid program, it is also important that Alabama Medicaid recipients continue to have access to medically-necessary prescriptions prescribed legally by their physicians,” said Medicaid Commissioner Carol Steckel.

Commissioner Steckel expressed appreciation of the state’s Medicaid providers’ efforts to work closely with the Agency to comply with the new federal law while meeting the needs of recipients.

“The State of Alabama is indebted to these individuals and organizations not only because they are providing care to Alabama’s most vulnerable citizens, but also for their willingness to seek workable solutions to meet this deadline,” she said.

Updated information on the use of tamper-resistant prescriptions by Medicaid providers, including a Provider Compliance Form that can be used to report non-compliant prescribers, is available on the Agency’s website, www.medicaid.alabama.gov

Contact Us: **Recipient Questions & Assistance: 1-800-362-1504**
 Provider Assistance (EDS) 1-800-688-7989
 Website: www.medicaid.alabama.gov

