



## AB 1202: Children in Medi-Cal

### **Background**

The California Medical Assistance Program (Medi-Cal) is California's Medicaid program serving low-income individuals, including families, seniors, persons with disabilities, children in foster care, pregnant women and childless adults with incomes below 138% of the federal poverty level.

Approximately half of California's children (5.5 million) receive medical care through Medi-Cal. Children covered by Medicaid programs are more likely to be born with low birth weights or have developmental delays, learning disorders, or other medical conditions requiring quality health care. Children on Medi-Cal are also predominantly children of color from historically marginalized communities.

Medi-Cal is managed by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) which enacts federal Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment requirements to provide prevention services including immunizations, lead screenings, behavioral and mental health assessments, and physical exams including measurements and sensory screenings.

Childhood prevention services provide early detection, treatment or prevention of health problems that could negatively impact a child's entire life. Children who do not receive these services are at a greater risk of medical conditions with potential long-term impacts.

### **The Problem**

The California State Auditor found that DHCS is providing less than half of the children on Medi-Cal with prevention services, which means an average of 2.9 million children are missing some of these essential services. The percentage of children receiving this care is even lower among certain age groups: nearly three-quarters of 2-year-olds on Medi-Cal did not receive the required number of

prevention services, which includes blood lead testing and screening for developmental disorders.

California ranks 40th for all states in providing preventive health services to children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state that many children have delays in language or other areas that can affect how they do in school but these delays are not identified until a child is already in school.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, DHCS efforts to improve its oversight of health plans' provision of children's prevention services were placed on hold. A global health pandemic provides more reason, not less, to ramp up the availability of these services.

### **Solution**

The State Auditor's office recommended that DHCS identify where more Medi-Cal providers are needed and request additional funding from the legislature to increase the number of providers in those identified areas. The first step to solving the provider shortage is making the data on where the problem exists public. A disclosure detailing which areas are underserved would encourage the legislature to make strategic investments addressing this issue.

### **What This Bill Will Do**

This proposal requires DHCS to identify where providers are most needed for children on Medi-Cal.

### **Sponsor**

The Children's Partnership

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