

Don't Waiver on Health Care Coalition

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CMS REJECTS BLANK CHECK WAIVER REQUEST

The federal agency in charge of Medicaid wants more details about Washington's Medicaid waiver proposal and information about the public process

Seattle, Wash. -- DSHS Secretary Braddock's attempt to waive key consumer protections in federal Medicaid law faced a major set-back this week when a federal agency told DSHS that it must provide more details in its request.

In a letter dated January 25, 2002 from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to Washington's Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), CMS identified "major issues" with the waiver.

"The Don't Waiver on Health Care Coalition has been raising concerns about the lack of details and the lack of a public process since the public first learned of the proposal last Fall. Hopefully, this letter will force DSHS to tell the public exactly what its intentions are with the Medicaid program – the primary source of health insurance for over 900,000 Washingtonians," said Barbara Barron Flye, executive director of Washington Citizen Action, a member group of the Don't Waiver on Health Care Coalition.

In the letter:

+ CMS rejects the blank check waiver approach and requests a detailed proposal

"We request that you submit a detailed proposal outlining exactly what changes you would make to benefits and cost-sharing, and your timeframe for implementation. Please also specify the eligibility groups that would be subject to these changes," the letter said.

+ CMS wants more information on DSHS' public process and how public comment was incorporated into the application.

"Please provide more detail on your public process, specifically how the feedback from stakeholders was incorporated into the application," the letter said.

(more)

+ CMS “strongly” prefers a firm commitment to implementing an expansion.

In its waiver, DSHS suggests that it will expand coverage by using federal SCHIP funds to cover parents of children on Medicaid and possibly other adults but does not say how or when.

“Your application mentions an expansion in 2003 but there are contingencies. We strongly prefer a firm commitment to implementing an expansion, particularly in light of your proposal to receive Federal Financial Participation (FFP) for some state-funded coverage...Please provide more specific information on the state-funded slots that you propose to move to the demonstration,” the letter said.

“We are very pleased that CMS heard many of our concerns. However, this letter does not mean the end of the waiver. Representative Shay Schual-Berke’s amended “Sunshine Bill” (HB 2461) is critical to ensure that DSHS stops operating in secret and provides the public and the legislation with evidence-based analysis about why this waiver is needed and how it will impact Medicaid consumers and the state budget,” said Flye.

The Don’t Waiver on Health Care Coalition is made up organizations representing seniors, children, families, people with disabilities, health care workers, and community agencies.

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