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DHS to end Medicaid managed care dental program, return to fee-for-service

(LITTLE ROCK, Ark.) — The Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) announced today that it will end its Medicaid managed care dental program and return beneficiaries who qualify for dental coverage to the Medicaid fee-for-service program beginning later this year.

DHS expects to launch this program on November 1, 2024, and efforts to support this change are being prioritized immediately.

“After careful consideration of dental service utilization, the total program expenditures, and the work underway to ensure a holistic, efficient, and sustainable Medicaid delivery system for all Arkansans, DHS has determined that fee-for-service for Medicaid dental services is both the best and most cost-effective option at this time,” DHS Secretary Kristi Putnam said. “This change shifts management of the program to the DHS Division of Medical Services (DMS), where we will operate it efficiently and effectively. This transition makes better sense for Arkansas patients, dentists, and taxpayers.”

In a letter sent on Friday, DHS formally notified the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services of the plan to sunset the program and to switch back to Medicaid fee-for-service for dental services instead. The letter also includes a month-by-month transition plan for activities leading up to the targeted November 1 start date. DHS notified both companies that currently operate the managed care dental program — Delta Dental of Arkansas and Managed Care of North America (MCNA) — of the plan today.

“Our staff will work closely with providers, partners, and other stakeholders to make this transition seamless and assure that care remains readily available for beneficiaries leading up to November 1 and beyond,” Putnam said.

With this shift, beneficiaries served by the managed care dental program will continue to be eligible for dental services. However, DHS will administer the program instead of Delta Dental and MCNA. In the months leading up to November 1, beneficiaries can expect to continue receiving dental services through Delta Dental and MCNA, and should watch for important communications from DHS about this program.

The dental managed care program within Arkansas Medicaid has been in effect since January 1, 2018, and as of this month serves 572,047 beneficiaries.

Under the managed care program, DHS pays a monthly amount per beneficiary to Delta Dental and MCNA in exchange for those carriers serving most Arkansans who receive dental services through Medicaid.

Additional information about the managed care dental program is available on the DHS website at humanservices.arkansas.gov.

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