Steadfast in Serving All Amidst the Public Charge Rule

Fear spreads more quickly than facts, and the new Public Charge rule, published in August 2019, continues to propagate confusion and anxiety — even amongst immigrant families who are not directly affected. At CommuniCare Health Centers, we remain steadfast in our mission to serve anyone in our community, regardless of legal status. Our doors remain open to all, and we continue to be a trusted source of information for our patients, their families and our broader community.

The rule, set to take effect in October 2019, would allow the federal government to more easily deny permanent residency status (e.g. green cards or entry visas) to applicants who use — or are deemed likely to use — federally funded CalFresh benefits, housing assistance and Medi-Cal.

Although in three recent rulings, federal judges in New York, California and Washington State issued injunctions temporarily blocking the Public Charge rule, we continue to prepare for the rule to go into effect. Our providers and staff are working to keep patients informed about their rights and the challenges associated with the new regulations. Conservative estimates indicate that 12 percent of Medi-Cal users are legal immigrants, which suggests that more than 2,000 CommuniCare patients could be impacted by the rule.

Additionally, advocacy organizations predict that Medi-Cal disenrollment among the impacted population could range from 20 to 60 percent.

Fortunately, the network of community health centers across the nation that are committed to providing care to our most vulnerable community members, regardless of their ability to pay, insurance status or legal status. We will continue to balance keeping patients informed while doing our best not to scare patients into dropping health benefits, or worse, avoiding health care altogether.

“We’ve already started to see the effects of the Public Charge rule on the families we serve every day,” says CEO Melissa Marshall, MD. From missed appointments to requests to withdraw from the recently expanded Medi-Cal coverage for undocumented children, or withdrawal from essential food benefits (WIC or CalFresh) — these are just a few examples of requests our staff have received during the past few months.

This rule will not only impact our legal immigrant neighbors, it will reverberate throughout the community, state, and nation. Your gift to CommuniCare Health Centers illustrates your support for these vulnerable people and truly makes a difference.
In September, CommuniCare Health Centers was awarded a federal grant to subsidize a portion of the cost to renovate the unoccupied HOPE building at our Family Wellness Center in Woodland. With this funding, we anticipate cutting the ribbon in 2021 and begin providing services at our very own Pediatric and Specialty Dental Center. As an integral part of the safety net for Yolo County’s most vulnerable residents, CommuniCare Health Centers is the main provider of oral health services for the low-income and Medi-Cal population and also serves as the primary dental home for more than 5,100 adults and 4,900 children under the age of 18. One in ten children in Yolo County receive their dental care at CommuniCare. Despite the breadth of services offered, there continues to be unmet need. In order to increase access for our patients, we applied for federal funding to expand dental services at CommuniCare.

Renovations for the new dental center are set to begin in early 2020. With our community’s continued support, we look forward to bringing additional dental infrastructure and innovative programming to our county’s residents. We expect this new service location to significantly increase oral health access for both vulnerable children and adults.
Expanding Medication-Assisted Treatment to Youth

This fall, we expanded our opioid prevention, treatment, and early intervention services for youth and emerging adults ages 12-24 throughout Yolo County. CommuniCare began offering Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) to adults in 2016. Prior to launching that program, there were no Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) providers serving Medi-Cal and uninsured community members in Yolo County. With this new funding, we are able to expand MAT services to include serving youth, along with prevention and early intervention services. CommuniCare is one of the primary outpatient mental health/substance use disorders (SUD) providers for youth and adults (including MAT) within Yolo County. Substance use during early adulthood can have significant and lasting consequences, and reaching our youth at this vulnerable time is crucial. In addition to expanding access to evidence-based medications, these young adults and youth are also provided with specialized behavioral health/SUD treatment services in peer groups designed to meet their developmental needs.

Additionally, this funding allows for the development of a Youth Advisory Group that will be able to provide direct feedback and guidance for program development and engagement strategies. As with all of CommuniCare’s youth and family programs, parent and caregiver engagement will continue to be a significant part of our approach to effectively serve youth. This program is just one example of how CommuniCare, with continued community investments, will continue to innovate programming to address the evolving needs of our community.

1. This service is supported by a federal grant under the State Opioid Response program, with funding provided by the California Department of Health Care Services.

Welcome, Dr. Eidson-Ton

Earlier this year, we welcomed Dr. W. Suzanne Eidson-Ton as CommuniCare’s new Chief Medical Officer. Dr. Eidson-Ton comes to CommuniCare Health Centers after working with UC Davis Health for 21 years, first as a resident in the combined Family Medicine/Obstetrics program, and then as a faculty member in the Departments of Family and Community Medicine and OB/GYN. Holding numerous positions of leadership within UC Davis Health, she was most recently the Director of the Rural PRIME, a program of the medical school which aims to develop physician leaders for rural communities in California. Dr. Eidson-Ton completed her medical training at UCSF and concurrently obtained a Masters of Health and Medical Sciences at UC Berkeley. She continues to practice full-spectrum Family Medicine, with a focus on women’s health, maternity care, well-child care, and adolescent medicine. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family, her partner, two children, two cats, two dogs, and two chickens, and gardening, hiking, and cooking.
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