



Alaska Native Health Board

THE VOICE OF ALASKA TRIBAL HEALTH SINCE 1968

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ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL
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VALDEZ NATIVE TRIBE

November 12, 2021

Courtney O'Byrne King, Medicaid State Plan Coordinator
Alaska Department of Health & Social Services
3601 C Street, Suite 902
Anchorage, AK 99503

RE: Proposed Medicaid State Plan Amendment on Non-Emergency Transportation

Dear Ms. King,

The Alaska Native Health Board (ANHB)¹ is writing to provide comments on the Tribal Consultation opportunity for the proposed Medicaid state Plan Amendment and Alternative Benefit Plan on Non-Emergency Transportation (NEMT). We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the changes required by Division CC, Title II, Section 209 in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260).

We realize that the Department must comply with these new federal requirements. But we urge you to find the least burdensome and disruptive way to implement them, to consult with tribal providers as you develop your implementation plan, to minimize any new requirements for shuttle services, and to consider increasing payment rates for ground transportation services.

ANHB agrees with the Department's assessment that the new requirements will decrease the availability of NEMT ground transportation resources for patients of Tribal health providers. Unfortunately, the requirements will exacerbate the acute shortage of services that is already a problem in parts of the State. There are communities in Alaska where there are no longer any taxi services available to Medicaid beneficiaries because the process to enroll, comply, and be reimbursed by the Medicaid program was so burdensome that taxi service providers stopped participating in the Medicaid program. In these communities, Tribal health providers have had to start providing transportation via shuttle system to meet patient transportation needs. In some locations, the airlines will provide shuttle service for the patients to the local hospital.

¹ ANHB was established in 1968 with the purpose of promoting the spiritual, physical, mental, social, and cultural well-being and pride of Alaska Native people. ANHB is the statewide voice on Alaska Native health issues and is the advocacy organization for the Alaska Tribal Health System (ATHS), which is comprised of tribal health programs that serve all of the 229 Tribes and over 177,000 Alaska Native and American Indian people throughout the state. The ATHS administers clinical and public health programs for AI/AN people throughout the state of Alaska. As the statewide tribal health advocacy organization, ANHB supports Alaska's Tribes and Tribal programs achieve effective consultation and communication with state and federal agencies on matters of concern.

Under these shuttle services, if a shuttle driver works for a health or tribal organization they are already required to pass a background check and comply with an alcohol and drug policy. The driver's record would be subject to insurance and corporate approval. This is likely also true for shuttle services provided by the airlines. In many cases, the City or State also reviews the drivers' record for a taxi or chauffeur's license, so many of the same safeguards are already in place. We urge the Department, if at all possible, to avoid imposing any new burdens on these shuttle services.

Further, it may be necessary for the Department to increase reimbursement rates for ground transportation services. There is already an acute shortage of drivers willing to enroll as Medicaid providers, and any new requirements will only make that situation worse, unless rates are increased to help compensate the drivers for the added cost and burden of meeting the requirements. The Medicaid program has a legal obligation to set payment rates high enough to ensure that Medicaid beneficiaries have the same access to services as non-Medicaid patients in the same vicinity.²

There may also be innovative ways to address the ground transportation needs of Medicaid beneficiaries served by Tribal health organizations. ANHB invites the Department to have a conversation on the future of NEMT ground transportation services in Alaska and how the Alaska Tribal Health System can support continued access to these critical services.

We appreciate the Department's work to limit the impact on health care providers and transportation providers to ensure that Medicaid beneficiaries and providers can still access necessary NEMT ground transportation resources. Please let ANHB know if there is any way we can support the Department's efforts to reduce this burden and continue access to these critical transportation resources. You can contact ANHB at anhb@anhb.org or via telephone (907) 729-7510.

Sincerely,



Andrew Jimmie, Tribally-Elected Leader of the Village of Minto
Chairman
Alaska Native Health Board

² CMCS Informational Bulletin, "Medicaid Coverage of Certain Medical Transportation under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law 116-260), July 12, 2021, pg. 2. Accessed (<https://www.medicaid.gov/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/cib071221.pdf>).