

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Update Your Medicaid Contact Information in Advance of the End of the Public Health Emergency, DHS Commissioner Says

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Beverly Telesford **February 28, 2023**



As the declared public health emergency in the United States comes to an end, the V.I. Department of Human Services is calling on people enrolled in Medicaid to ensure that their contact information is up to date.

Last month, the White House announced that the Covid-19 Public Health Emergency, declared in 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic, will end on May 11.

Part of the emergency response to the pandemic by Congress was the enactment of the

FFCRA, the Families First Coronavirus Response Program. This law included a requirement to have participants in the Medicaid program continuously enrolled until the end of this month.

The government also adjusted Medicaid reimbursement policies to help improve access to treatment and other resources crucial to controlling the spread of Covid-19.

Medicaid rolls in the territory grew substantially as a result, said Kimberly Causey-Gomez, Department of Human Services commissioner, at Monday's press briefing from Government House.

However, once the continuous enrollment provision ends, some Virgin Islanders may lose coverage.

"As part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2023 signed into law on December 29th 2022, Congress set an end of March 31st for the continuous enrollment provision, and phases down the enhanced federal Medicaid matching funds through December 2023," Ms. Causey-Gomez explained.

As a result, "if you're currently a Medicaid member, it's really important that you make sure that DHS has your current updated information," she said.

Current Medicaid beneficiaries will soon receive correspondence on the issue from the department. "You're also going to be checking your mail, your postal mail, the snail mail. DHS will mail you a paper letter about your Medicaid coverage. This letter will let you know if you need to complete a renewal form to see if you still qualify for the Medicaid benefits," Ms. Causey-Gomez said.

Those needing to update their mailing address or other contact information such as email address and telephone number can do so via the DHS website dhs.gov.vi.

"Because we have a new Update My Contact citizens portal, that will also provide Medicaid members an easier way to provide the most updated current contact information — including a cell phone number and address and a mailing address," Ms. Causey-Gomez noted. This option, she says, will allow DHS to text Medicaid beneficiaries, at no cost to them, with any updates to their information.

"Because of that messaging capability, we can send you that text message and it'll contain a link that you can automatically update your contact information, so you don't have to come into our office."

During Monday's briefing, Ms. Causey-Gomez also reminded households that February 28 marks the end of the emergency allotment provided to recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit during the pandemic. Once the Temporary Emergency Grant expires, each SNAP household will again receive benefits based on the usual factors used to determine eligibility, such as household size, income, and deductions.

Therefore, each household's benefits will vary based on their current circumstances, which may have changed since before the pandemic. This action would be automatic, so

no action needs to be taken by SNAP consumers as opposed to those on Medicaid.

“Since March 2020 our DHS team has worked tirelessly throughout the Public Health Emergency to ensure our 11,000 plus snap households receive the maximum benefits we could,” Ms. Causey-Gomez said.

This she said assisted both the families and the VI economy. She urged households to prepare now to accommodate this reduction in benefits. She reminded SNAP recipients that the decreases they would see reflected in their benefits are due to the 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act. The VIDHS, she says, has no control over that federal change.