



Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

5600 Fishers Lane Rockville, MD 20857

www.samhsa.gov 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)



September 26, 2024

Dear Colleague:

The behavioral health needs of children, youth and their families are one of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) strategic priorities outlined in our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan¹. We know from our National Survey on Drug Use and Health² that far too many young people report mental health and substance use challenges. To address these needs, in the past four years, we have received a significant increase in funding from Congress to support children and youth, especially in schools, to strengthen the system of care. Yet, there remain great need and opportunity to ensure children and youth are receiving all the appropriate care and services they need to thrive.

On September 26, 2024, the Center for Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Services (CMCS) released important new guidance regarding coverage requirements for eligible children and youth enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP. The guidance, in the form of a State Health Official letter entitled, *Best Practices for Adhering to Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) Requirements*,³ is intended to support states as they work to strengthen their implementation of EPSDT requirements to help ensure improved health outcomes for children and youth enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP.

Medicaid and CHIP together provide health coverage for nearly half of all children and youth in the United States, including many children with behavioral health challenges. Children with a wide range of needs benefit from EPSDT services including children with developmental disabilities, children who have complex medical conditions, and children who need behavioral health services. Families depend on EPSDT services to support their children in school, at home, and in the community from birth through age 21. The EPSDT guidance includes a section on Improving Care for Children with Specialized Needs, as well as on Expanding the Child-Focused Workforce to specifically address the needs of the children and youth we serve.

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Strategic Plan: Fiscal Year 2023-2026. Publication No. PEP23-06-00-002 MD: National Mental Health and Substance Use Laboratory, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023. available at: <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/samhsa-strategic-plan.pdf>

² See Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2024). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP24-07-021, NSDUH Series H-59). Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2023-nsduh-annual-national-report>

³ <https://www.medicaid.gov/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/sho24005.pdf>

This new EPSDT guidance provides an overview of EPSDT requirements and how states can fulfill them. It discusses policies, strategies, and best practices to maximize health care access and utilization for EPSDT-eligible children. The guidance is divided into three broad topics:

- **Promoting EPSDT awareness and accessibility** to ensure eligible beneficiaries have comprehensive coverage, are aware of their coverage, know how to access Medicaid benefits, and have supports like transportation and care coordination to facilitate getting the care that they need.
- **Expanding and using the child-focused EPSDT workforce** by broadening provider qualifications, encouraging the use of interprofessional consultation, and using payment methodologies to address provider shortages and to help assure that there are an adequate number of health care providers available to meet the needs of beneficiaries.
- **Improving care for EPSDT-eligible children with specialized needs**, with a particular focus on how EPSDT requirements relate to the unique needs of children with behavioral health conditions, children in foster care, and children with increased or complex health care needs or disabilities.

We encourage you to work closely with your state Medicaid agencies to help strengthen access to care for children and youth enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP. This guidance should be helpful to the efforts of all organizations and entities in SAMHSA's network that support children, youth, and their families in receiving the health coverage services they need and may be entitled to under federal Medicaid law. EPSDT services are integral to our collective efforts to assure that every child and adolescent is healthy and has the services they need to live and be part of their school and community.

Thank you for your dedication and partnership. If you have any questions, please contact your state Medicaid agency.

Sincerely,

/Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon/

Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary for Mental Health
and Substance Use