

# A GUIDE TO ACCESSING MEDI-CAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR CURRENT AND FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

## About This Guide

This guide provides information and resources to current and former foster youth on how to access mental health services through California's Medicaid program (Medi-Cal).

### Who is a "current foster youth" under Medi-Cal?

A current foster youth is someone who is in foster care *right now*. This includes non-minor dependents in extended foster care.

### What about a "former foster youth"?

A former foster youth is someone who was in foster care in *any* state on their 18th birthday or later.



If you're unsure whether you're a current or former foster youth, contact the **Foster Care Ombudsman Office** at 1-877-846-1602 or [fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov](mailto:fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov)

If you're not a foster youth, you may still qualify for Medi-Cal mental health services for other reasons. Check out Page 5 of this guide for additional resources.

## Need mental health help now?

Free. No insurance needed.

- Family Urgent Response System (FURS) (available 24/7 for current and former foster youth): Call or text 1-833-939-3877, or chat online at [Cal-FURS.org](http://Cal-FURS.org)
- Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741-741
- The Trevor Project (for LGBTQIA+ youth): Call 1-866-488-7386, text START to 678-678, or chat online at [thetrevorproject.org/webchat](http://thetrevorproject.org/webchat)
- CalHOPE (for peer support): Call 833-317-HOPE (4673) or chat online at [calhopeconnect.org](http://calhopeconnect.org)



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## Getting Mental Health Services

### What mental health services does Medi-Cal cover?

Medi-Cal covers medically necessary screenings and treatment for conditions related to your mental health. If you are under age 21, you can get more services from Medi-Cal through "Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment Services" (EPSDT).

There are different categories of Medi-Cal mental health services, including "SMHS" and "NSMHS."

**SMHS** = Specialty mental health services, which are provided through your county mental health plan (MHP)

**NSMHS** = Non-specialty mental health services, which are provided through your managed care plan (MCP) or Medi-Cal fee-for-service (FFS)

**MHPs** = county-operated health plans that manage SMHS and substance-use disorder treatment

**MCPs** = privately-operated health plans (like Kaiser, Anthem, or LA Care) that contract with the State to manage NSMHS and other Medi-Cal services



**FFS** = when Medi-Cal directly pays providers, instead of going through a health plan

### What types of mental health services are available?

Here are some examples of SMHS:

- Therapy or counseling
- Medication support
- Eating disorder services
- Supports during a crisis
- Facility-based or hospital services
- Case management
- Peer support services
- Foster care support (for under 21)
- Intensive home-based services (for under 21)



Here are some examples of NSMHS:

- Individual, family, and group therapy
- Medication support
- Outpatient drug and alcohol support
- Dyadic services (joint screening and treatment) for you and your parent/caregiver (for under 21)



You can get SMHS and NSMHS at the same time!

# A GUIDE TO ACCESSING MEDICAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR CURRENT AND FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

## Getting Mental Health Services

### Do I qualify for mental health services?

#### For SMHS

If you're under 21, you have a right to SMHS if:

- You have a mental health disorder; OR
- You have been involved in the child welfare system or experienced other trauma.

You do **NOT** need to have a diagnosis to get mental health care!

If you're 21 or older, you have a right to SMHS if:

- You have a mental health disorder (either diagnosed or suspected); AND
- That condition negatively impacts important parts of your day-to-day life, or is likely to.

If you're involved in the child welfare system, but not in foster care, you still have a right to access SMHS without a diagnosis.



#### For NSMHS

If you're under 21, you have a right to NSMHS if:

- You have a **potential** mental health disorder; OR
- You need screening or treatment to improve your mental health.

If you're 21 or older, you have a right to NSMHS if:

- You have a **potential** mental health disorder; OR
- You have a mental health condition that is causing distress or negatively impacting important parts of your day-to-day life.

### How do I get mental health services?

#### To get SMHS

Contact your county mental health plan (MHP). Find their contact info at [tinyurl.com/DHCSMHPs](https://tinyurl.com/DHCSMHPs)

#### To get NSMHS

If you're enrolled in a managed care plan (MCP), then contact them. Find contact info at [tinyurl.com/DHCSMCPs](https://tinyurl.com/DHCSMCPs)

If you're not enrolled in a MCP, but instead in fee-for-service (FFS), then call Health Care Options (HCO) at 1-800-430-4263 for help finding a provider.



If you're unsure whether you have a MCP or FFS, check with your social worker or contact your county's social services agency ([tinyurl.com/CountyHealthOffices](https://tinyurl.com/CountyHealthOffices))



**Not sure where to start?**

Contact your county mental health plan first ([tinyurl.com/DHCSMHPs](https://tinyurl.com/DHCSMHPs))

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## Q & A

### How do I find a mental health provider?

Contact your county MHP or your MCP. You can also contact the Health Consumer Alliance at 1-888-804-3536 for further help.

### How do I know if I need SMHS or NSMHS, or both?

Contact your county MHP or your MCP for an assessment.

### Can I change my provider?

Yes! You can change providers any time. Call your county MHP or MCP to ask for more options.

### Can I get help with transportation to my appointments?

Yes. Call your MCP (if you are enrolled in one) or your FFS provider. Find more information, including a list of transportation providers, at [tinyurl.com/DHCSTransportation](http://tinyurl.com/DHCSTransportation)

### How quickly can I get a mental health appointment?

Your county MHP is required to give you an urgent appointment within 48 hours (or 96 hours if a prior authorization is required) AND a non-urgent appointment (including new and follow-up) within 10 business days of your request or your last appointment.

### Can I get mental health services without a parent or caretaker agreeing?

If you're 12 or older, you may be able to get services like counseling on your own if a provider thinks you are mature enough to consent. Ask your MCP or your social worker about how to get these services. Learn more at [tinyurl.com/MinorConsentResource](http://tinyurl.com/MinorConsentResource)



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## Resources

### DIRECTORY

**County Mental Health Plans (MHPs)**  
[tinyurl.com/DHCSMHPs](https://tinyurl.com/DHCSMHPs)

**Managed Care Plans (MCPs)**  
[tinyurl.com/DHCSMCPs](https://tinyurl.com/DHCSMCPs)

**County Medi-Cal Offices**  
[tinyurl.com/CountyHealthOffices](https://tinyurl.com/CountyHealthOffices)

### Foster Care Questions

Foster Care Ombudsman  
1-877-846-1602  
or  
[tinyurl.com/FosterCareOmbudsman](https://tinyurl.com/FosterCareOmbudsman)

### Free Legal Help

Health Consumer Alliance (HCA)  
1-888-804-3536  
TTY 877-735-2929  
[healthconsumer.org](https://healthconsumer.org)

### Free 24/7 Support

The Family Urgent Response System (FURS) provides free 24/7 call, text, live chat, and in-person support to children and youth who have spent time in foster care – for issues big or small.

Call/Text 1-833-939-3877  
OR chat at [Cal-FURS.org](https://Cal-FURS.org)

**Foster Youth Bill of Rights:**  
[tinyurl.com/FYBillOfRights](https://tinyurl.com/FYBillOfRights)

**Reproductive Health Resources:**  
[tinyurl.com/nhelp-youth-resources](https://tinyurl.com/nhelp-youth-resources)

**General Mental Health Resource:**  
[tinyurl.com/NCYL-mental-health](https://tinyurl.com/NCYL-mental-health)



# MEDI-CAL ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT FOR CURRENT AND FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

## YOU ARE ELIGIBLE FOR MEDI-CAL

As a current or former foster youth, you should have been automatically enrolled in Medi-Cal.

If you are a current foster youth:

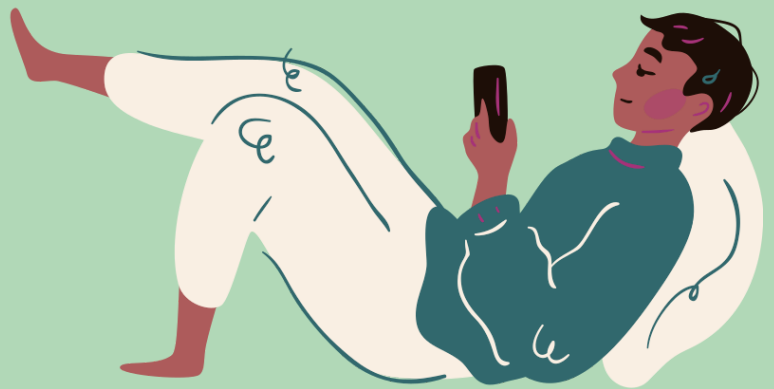
- You are eligible for Medi-Cal. It does not matter how much money you, your parents, or your caregivers make.
- If you are under 18 and decide to stay in extended foster care, you do not lose Medi-Cal or need to re-apply when you turn 18.
- Even if you choose to leave foster care after you turn 18, your Medi-Cal will continue without any gap in coverage until you are 26.

If you are a former foster youth:

- You are eligible for Medi-Cal. It does not matter how much money you make.
- If you are not already enrolled, then you should contact the Health Consumer Alliance (HCA) at 1-888-805-3536.

## WHAT IF I LOST MY MEDI-CAL?

If you lost Medi-Cal or have questions about it, contact your social worker or the HCA at 1-888-805-3536 or [healthconsumer.org](http://healthconsumer.org).



## Learn More

- [My Medi-Cal: How to Get the Health Care You Need](https://dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/myMediCal.pdf) ([dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/myMediCal.pdf](https://dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/myMediCal.pdf)): A resource from the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) that has more detail about how to apply for Medi-Cal and what services it covers.
- [DHCS FAQs for the Former Foster Youth Program](https://tinyurl.com/DHCSFFY) ([tinyurl.com/DHCSFFY](https://tinyurl.com/DHCSFFY))
- [Covered Til 26](https://coveredtil26.org) ([coveredtil26.org](https://coveredtil26.org)): A resource that provides former foster youth information about how to access free Medi-Cal coverage and what to do if a county worker doesn't know about Medi-Cal for former foster youth.

Contact HCA at 1-888-805-3536 or [healthconsumer.org](http://healthconsumer.org) for any questions.