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CMS TAKES EMERGENCY STEPS TO EASE HEALTH CARE ACCESS TO KATRINA EVACUEES

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has adopted a series of emergency policy changes to accommodate the needs of thousands of displaced Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) beneficiaries who have fled Hurricane Katrina and need urgent medical attention in their new host states.

As announced by President Bush, special evacuee status will be granted to all those who fled states because of Hurricane Katrina. This designation will allow those persons to apply for the full range of federal benefits administered by the states without having to produce the normal forms of documentation to verify eligibility.

These programs include Medicaid; SCHIP; temporary assistance for needy families; child care; mental health services and substance abuse treatment; food stamps; housing; foster care; women, infants and children nutrition; school lunch; unemployment compensation; and job training.

Accordingly, CMS is working with affected states to develop a new Medicaid and SCHIP application template, through which states may be granted emergency section 1115 demonstrations to provide temporary eligibility for all eligibility groups. Using this new program, evacuees displaced because of the storm will be able to quickly enroll in Medicaid or the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) in the state to which they have been evacuated. Applications will be accepted retroactively from August 24, 2005.

The administration is working with Congress to provide financial support to states that provide Medicaid and SCHIP coverage to evacuees who are currently residing in their states. Consequently, CMS is allowing states to count the full expected cost of these temporary programs in their financial statements to determine federal payments.

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Among the Medicaid and SCHIP changes available through the special Section 1115 demonstration initiative will be:

- Waiver of the normal document requirements verifying their Medicaid or SCHIP status in their home states or any information relating to household income or employment;
- Provision of temporary eligibility to applicants who are already enrollees in their home state. During the period of presumptive eligibility, the host state is required to verify circumstances of eligibility to the extent possible;
- Evacuees may apply using a simplified application in the host state;
- Host states, at a minimum, will provide their own Medicaid and SCHIP benefit packages to the evacuees;
- Host states must extend the expedited application process to evacuees who may be newly eligible because of new economic circumstances created by the hurricane (i.e. loss of job and income that may have made them ineligible prior to the storm.);
- Host states will submit their estimated expenditures to CMS as a component of their usual cost reporting for determining federal payments.

CMS has assigned staff to work with all states who are hosting evacuees to provide speedy access to Medicaid and SCHIP benefits to those in need.

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