



May 20, 2020

Senate Budget Committee 3 – Health
SBUD.Committee@senate.ca.gov

RE: Medi-Medi Navigator Program Funding

Dear Ms. Chair and Committee Members:

On behalf of [Health Center Partners of Southern California](#), representing 17 member organizations, including 12 Federally Qualified Health Centers, 4 Indian Health Centers, and Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, which operate over 160 practice sites across five counties, and serve 917,000 patients with 3.9 million patient visits annually, **I FULLY SUPPORT [San Diegans for Healthcare Coverage \(SDHCC\)](#) ask the committee include the request by Assemblymember Low for \$12 million dollars in the 2021-2022 budget to fund the Medi-Medi Navigator program.** This funding will help to expand, strengthen, and move existing and effective pilot programs towards sustainability, as well as draw down additional federal funds, at a one-to-one match.

Enrolling in Medicare at 65 is often confusing to the most informed English speakers. Add to that a requirement to transition to different Aged and Disabled Medi-Cal eligibility rules, which most are not aware of until after they have enrolled in a Medicare Plan. Low-income seniors face real access and economic perils during this transition period. Many are at risk of losing Medi-Cal and facing cost sharing, co-payments and payment of Medicare Part B premiums.

While some seniors are automatically enrolled in Medicare Parts A & B upon turning 65, not all are and must take action to enroll in advance. Many are not made aware of the impending changes to their Medi-Cal eligibility rules until they lose coverage. Meanwhile, they may be counseled into a Medicare plan that results in access and continuity issues, as well as significant financial hardships if they lose their Medi-Cal.

San Diegans for Healthcare Coverage added low-income seniors to its target population several years ago when they realized this population was underserved and required targeted and specialized resources. Assisting with more complicated Aged and Disabled Medi-Cal eligibility and retention and then ensuring these seniors are enrolled in the Medicare plans that best meet their needs is resource intensive. SDHCC receives referrals from community health centers (like HCP members), legal aid and other community organizations, often after the consumer has lost their full scope Medi-Cal.



The California Coverage and Health Initiative (CCHI), a network of non-profit agencies, provides critically important outreach, enrollment support, retention, and utilization services to Medi-Cal, Medi-Medi and Covered California populations. **The Medi-Medi Navigator program will continue to build on these resources.** Non-profit enrollment agencies work closely with counties to assure Medi-Cal beneficiaries transitioning to, or already covered by, Medicare will get all the benefits to which they are entitled. Which is even more necessary during the Covid-19 pandemic. The program links low-income seniors to local community-based Medi-Cal navigators to avail them of the full ranges of Medicare and Medi-Cal options in an unbiased fashion. Individuals with developmental disabilities are also be served by this program. For seniors, who are at a significantly higher risk of getting seriously ill from Covid-19, there is additional concern about the out-of-pocket costs associated with treatment which can be eliminated through utilization of their dual coverage.

Expanding the Medi-Medi Navigator program statewide will firm up the ability of local agencies to address both the higher number of dual eligible individuals transitioning to Medicare, and the much higher risk of illness borne by low-income seniors.

This modest state investment will have a large impact on a population that is often left with costs they cannot afford and challenging access to care. Currently there are 22 Medi-Medi Navigator program sites in 20 counties. The additional funding would provide for expansion to new counties, and will provide expansion within existing counties. **In turn, this could lead to expanded outreach to an additional one million individuals and provide them with enhanced access to enroll in these programs and thereby improve their health.**

Thank you for your consideration of this budget request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Henry N. Tuttle".

Henry N. Tuttle
President and Chief Executive Officer

cc: San Diegans for Healthcare Coverage (SDHCC)
Health Center Partners Board of Directors

[Health Center Partners of Southern California](#), a family of companies, includes a 17-membership organization of federally qualified health centers, Indian Health Services Organizations, both urban and sovereign, and Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, collectively serving 917,000 patients each year, for 3.9 million patient visits each year, at 160 practice sites across San Diego, Riverside and Imperial counties, and is the seventh largest provider group in the region. [Read our latest Impact Report.](#)