



March 25, 2022

Re: Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare Continuous Eligibility

Dear Members of the House Health Finance and Policy Committee:

We are writing to express our collective support for 12-month continuous eligibility for Minnesotans under age 20 enrolled in Medicaid included in HF 4576. We encourage you to expand this to all Minnesotans.

As background, Hennepin Healthcare, Hennepin County Human Services, Hennepin County Public Health, NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center and Hennepin Health together serve over 400,000 people, many of whom use multiple services, across Hennepin County and beyond each year. Our award-winning entities collectively take an integrated and innovative approach to providing health care and social services and to reducing disparities in Hennepin County and beyond.

As we work with Minnesotans, we consistently hear that the challenge of tracking paperwork and staying enrolled in health care coverage can be overwhelming for many residents – particularly those dealing with housing instability, managing chronic health conditions or balancing other concerns. These barriers can be insurmountable and often result in eligible Minnesotans losing their health care coverage and being unable to access the cost-effective, preventative health care that is core to keeping our communities healthy. A continuous eligibility policy would provide the stability of a full year of health care coverage regardless of the slight and frequent fluctuations in income that many lower-income families experience, and would have impacts across our communities, including:

- *For Minnesota residents* – When residents lose health care coverage, they are often not able to access important preventative services, such as routine vaccinations, well-child checkups and other routine care. In our claims data, we often see that persons who return from gaps in coverage have high utilization of deep-end services that could have been more effectively addressed through more cost-effective means if all Minnesotans on medical assistance had continuous health care coverage.
- *For Minnesota health care providers* – When residents lose health care coverage, fewer receive routine primary care and more utilize emergency services, reducing health care providers' ability to improve overall health in partnership with their patients and increasing the amount of uncompensated care provided. These concerns are particularly acute for safety-net providers, such as Hennepin Healthcare and NorthPoint, that serve communities already facing significant barriers and disparities in health care access and outcomes. Since the public health emergency began in March 2020, Hennepin providers saw the uninsured rate fall, although continuous eligibility policies are likely only one factor driving these changes. For example, during the final three quarters of 2020, NorthPoint saw the rate of patients lacking insurance fall by 21.2%, as compared to the corresponding period in 2019.
- *For Minnesota government* – Lack of continuous eligibility results in increased numbers of eligible Minnesotans who churn on and off of medical assistance coverage, and this churn, in turn, creates additional work for county eligibility and enrollment staff throughout



Minnesota. Hennepin County has undertaken dedicated efforts to reduce enrollment churn among its member population – both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic – and these efforts have resulted in a decrease in eligible residents churning off of health care coverage.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen the impact that the temporary continuous eligibility policy contained in section 6008(b) of the Families First Act has had on our residents, resulting in approximately 5,500 eligible Hennepin County residents keeping health care coverage that they otherwise would have lost due to lapses in paperwork. The impact of this temporary policy has highlighted the urgency of eliminating the barriers that residents face in maintaining continuous health care coverage.

Thank you very much for your consideration of making the continuous eligibility policy permanent and for your ongoing support of the work of the Hennepin system to change how we build healthy, equitable communities in Minnesota.

If we may provide any additional information to you on the topic of continuous eligibility, please contact Kaade Wallace, Kaade.wallace@hennepin.us, 612-559-0447; or Susie Emmert susie.emmert@hcmcd.org, 651-278-5422.

Sincerely,

Jennifer DeCubellis
CEO, Hennepin
Healthcare

Jodi Wentland
Assistant County
Administrator, Hennepin
County Human Services

Stella Whitney-
West
CEO, NorthPoint
Health and
Wellness Center

Anne Kanyusik Yoakum
CEO, Hennepin Health