



A change for HIV-positive individuals on Medicaid

Beginning Oct. 1, most Medicaid beneficiaries in Niagara County who are living with HIV/AIDS will have to go into managed care. That will mean choosing between Independent Health Association; Community Blue, part of HealthNow New York; or Fidelis Care NY, part of the New York State Catholic Health Plan.

Some 2.9 million Medicaid beneficiaries across the state have been in managed care for years, but until this year, HIV-positive individuals were exempt. A few will still be exempt: Those who are also on Medicare, on the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), or on Medicaid Spend-Down. But the bulk of HIV-positive Medicaid beneficiaries will have to choose a managed care plan.

Every beneficiary affected by this policy change should check with their doctors or health care providers to find out which managed care plans they accept.

In Niagara County, Medicaid beneficiaries being treated for HIV will be mailed information about the change when they recertify, or if their case file is accessed for some other reason, such as address change. After that, they will have 30 days to choose which managed care provider they want. If they don't choose, the state will make the choice, which is not a good option because the state may arbitrarily select one that a beneficiary's physician does not participate in. If that happens, a beneficiary will have 90 days to switch, but after that they will be locked into the plan the state had selected.

HIV-positive individuals will have the same Medicaid benefits in managed care that they had in regular Medicaid. The main difference is that managed care members get most of their Medicaid benefits from the health plan's network of providers, hospitals, physicians, and clinics. They will have to choose a primary care physician in the network, but that can be their HIV-care physician.

One advantage to managed care plans is that some include services to help clients manage other chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes. All managed care plan members can get emergency services from any qualified provider.

For more information, call the Managed Care Unit of the Niagara County Department of Social Services at 439-7792.