

SMAA – Alternative Format Plan New Heights Charter School

Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to provide an outline of the process for qualified persons with speech, hearing, and/or vision disabilities to receive Medi-Cal information and communications in an alternative format that meets their needs. This plan will provide background information on this legal requirement, a description of the types of alternative formats available, specific timelines and resources for preparing these alternative formats, the process of requesting an alternative format, and a description of how this information will be stored.

Background

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. §12101, et. seq.) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (section 508), it is prohibited for public programs, such as Medi-Cal, to discriminate against those who are qualified members of the public based on disability. The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) and partnering entities providing Medi-Cal services, namely New Heights Charter School must protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, providing equal access to these programs and services. This includes support for those simply seeking information about Medi-Cal programs and services.

Therefore, New Heights Charter School must provide auxiliary aids and services to beneficiaries, their authorized representatives, or someone with whom communication is necessary and appropriate (e.g. a disabled parent or family member of a beneficiary) with speech, hearing, and/or vision disabilities. With these auxiliary aids and services, we must ensure that those with disabilities can participate in Medi-Cal programs and services, providing effective communication through the provision of program documents and information in alternative formats. Additionally, alternative formats must be utilized in addition to the requester's language preferences. Therefore, if a request is made for large print by a qualified member whose written preference is Spanish, the information must be provided in Spanish and large print. Such alternative formats must be provided free of charge.

Once a request has been made, alternative formats must be provided to the requester in a timely manner, which is defined in PPL No. 21-017R as within two months of the request.

Alternative Formats Available

When determining the type of auxiliary aid or service that is necessary, New Heights Charter School must consider the method of communication the person with a disability utilizes and the length and complexity of the information being communicated. While primary consideration should be given to the requester's specific format request, another format of communication is acceptable if New Heights Charter School, the Local Education Consortium (LEC), the Local Government Agency (LGA), or subcontractor demonstrates that it is equally effective. This is also true if New Heights Charter School, the LEC, or LGA determine that the use of the requester's choice format would fundamentally alter the information provided or cause an undue burden for the agency.

Alternative formats include, but are not limited to:

- Braille
- Large print (e.g. 20-point Arial Font)
- Audio format
- Accessible electronic format (e.g. a data CD)
- Closed Captioning
- Text-to-Speech
- Voice-to-Text

Resources and Timelines for Each Alternative Format

The timeline for the provision of alternative formats is dependent on the format requested and the specific document or information needing to be converted. DHCS has identified common program documents that are critical to guarantee equal access to programs and services. These documents are readily available in the following alternative formats: Large print (20-point Arial), audio format, accessible electronic format (such as a data CD), and braille. These documents will be provided to the beneficiary or authorized representative within three weeks of the request.

For all other documents and information, the following descriptions outline the timeline and potential resources New Heights Charter School will use to procure the necessary information and documents in each type of alternative format:

Braille

A contracted braille translation service, such as Braille Works, will be required to convert to this alternative format. Documents converted to braille will be provided within two months of receipt of the request.

Large Print

Documents that are requested in large print will be converted by New Heights Charter School's School-Based Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (SMAA) Coordinator. Documents will utilize 20-point Arial font. This includes all text and graph data. Images will be enlarged to the extent that they are still clear, in addition to original images. This would be provided within three weeks of the request. In the event that the SMAA Coordinator cannot complete this request, a service such as Braille Works will be contracted to convert the document to large print, to be completed within two months of the request.

Audio Format

A contractor, such as Braille Works or SeeWriteHear, will convert written documents into audio format. The audio file will be available within two months of the request. New Heights Charter School will offer to review documents verbally in-person with the requester to expedite

this timeline and provide answers to questions if necessary. This review process can be recorded if the requester is interested and it is agreed upon with the New Heights Charter School staff (e.g., SMAA Coordinator, Administrative Assistant, Clinician, etc.) providing the verbal review. In-person review would occur within two weeks of the request.

Accessible Electronic Format (e.g. a data CD)

A contractor, such as Braille Works, will convert documents into an accessible electronic format, such as a data CD. This will be completed within two months of the request.

Closed Captioning

Unless closed captioning is already available for the information requested, a contractor, such as SyncWords, will provide closed captioning for any live or prerecorded video inputs. This will be completed within two months of the request.

Text-to-Speech

Documents that are requested in text-to-speech format will be translated by a contractor, such as IBM Watson Text-to-Speech. This will be provided within two months of the request.

Voice-to-Text

Information that is requested in voice-to-text format will be transcribed by a contractor, such as IBM Speech-to-Text. This can be done for prerecorded or live audio inputs. This will be provided within two months of the request.

Another Format

If a qualified member requests an alternative format not listed here, New Heights Charter School will make every effort to provide the requested format. However, if the requested format would cause New Heights Charter School undue burden or would alter the information, another suitable format will be utilized to meet the needs of the requester. This will be provided within the two month timeframe from time of request.

Alternative Format Selection Application (AFSA) System

Requests for alternative formats can be made on the Alternative Format Selection Application (AFSA) system at <https://afs.dhcs.ca.gov/> or via phone at 1-833-284-0040. These requests can be completed by a qualified member, such as the student, parent/guardian, or another authorized representative. If asked to assist in completion of the form, New Heights Charter School will support the request by referring the qualified member to the LEC, as New Heights Charter School does not have access to all of the required information. This includes the beneficiary's name, the Benefits Identification Card (BIC) number, and date of birth.

Medi-Cal beneficiaries and their authorized representatives may only request one alternative format each, so they are encouraged to request the format that best suits their overall needs.

Processing Alternative Format Requests

The chain of communication regarding alternative format requests will occur as follows:

1. The beneficiary, parent/guardian, or another authorized representative will create a request on the AFSA system at <https://afs.dhcs.ca.gov/> or via phone at 1-833-284-0040.
2. Once the request goes through, it will appear in the final column on the data match output file for the SMAA program, titled "Alternative Format", reviewed by the LEC.
3. The LEC will notify New Heights Charter School of this request, and New Heights Charter School will notify the student/authorized representative that an alternative format request was received, the date of the request, the type of alternative format that will be provided, and the date it will be completed.
4. New Heights Charter School will complete the conversion in-house, obtain materials from DHCS, or contract with an appropriate service to complete the request before the two month deadline following the request.
5. The alternative format will be provided directly to the beneficiary/authorized representative in a timely manner.
6. This requested alternative format will be stored in New Heights Charter School records to ensure that Medi-Cal-related documents and information are prepared for future communications and services in the appropriate format. These records will be maintained by the SMAA Coordinator at New Heights Charter School, stored in the audit file for the SMAA program and New Heights Charter School's student data records. This will ensure that administrative staff consult with the SMAA Coordinator to properly prepare documents in the appropriate format, utilizing the established contract with a service provider.

Alternative Format Plan Availability

This Alternative Format Plan can be requested at any time after August 1, 2023 by any students, parents/guardians, other authorized representatives, or DHCS. Upon written or verbal request to the SMAA Coordinator, Principal, or Administrative Assistant, this plan will be emailed or verbally reviewed with the requesting party, according to the accessibility needs of the party. Additionally, this written plan will be located in the SMAA audit file and on the New Heights Charter School website at <https://www.newheightscharter.org/programs/smaa-alternative-format-plan>