

AHCCCS Reduction in Number of Covered Hours for Respite Care

In June, the AHCCCS Administration announced a proposal to reduce the total number of covered hours for respite care by 50% – from 720 hours per year to 360 hours per year. AHCCCS solicited public input both through its website and in two community forums held on June 23, 2011. The purpose of seeking public input was to invite AHCCCS members and their families to share with the AHCCCS Administration how families are currently using respite care and how this proposed reduction would impact them. AHCCCS committed to using the public input to inform any final decision regarding the reduction in respite care hours.

Through the public input process, AHCCCS also received written comments from over 500 individuals and nearly 250 individuals attended one of the two community forums. Most of the comments received were from families of AHCCCS members enrolled in the Arizona Long Term Care System (ALTCS) through the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). There were some comments also relating to the use of respite care for family members of individuals enrolled in the ALTCS program that serves individuals who are elderly or physically disabled and individuals served by the Division of Behavioral Health Services.

We are grateful for the many comments received. We acknowledge the incredibly difficult nature of sharing one's personal story publicly and we honor the courage that it took for so many families to provide us with insight into their daily struggles.

The stories were critical in informing the final decision to reduce respite care coverage from 720 hours per year to 600 hours per year – a reduction of just over 15%, rather than the 50% reduction originally proposed. These changes will be effective October 1, 2011.

We recognize that for some families, a reduction to 600 hours of respite care per year may be challenging. But we also want to be sure families understand the purpose of respite care. Respite care is offered so that family members can take some time for themselves to refresh, run errands, take a vacation, attend church or spend time with their spouse or other children. Some of the comments we received demonstrate that families are using respite care for other purposes, like going to work. Respite care is not designed for purposes other than for the family member to have the ability to take a needed break. We believe that 600 hours per year – 50 hours per month – will allow for families to receive needed respite.

Finally, AHCCCS serves 1.35 million Arizonans, *all* of whom represent vulnerable populations. The AHCCCS Administration has worked diligently to protect the core of the AHCCCS program and preserve coverage to the greatest extent possible, including coverage for the childless adult population. In order to achieve that goal and still meet the requirement of reducing the AHCCCS program by \$2.5 billion, we must strike an equitable balance. All areas of the AHCCCS program are experiencing reductions and additional cost saving measures will continue to be reviewed throughout the AHCCCS program.

We believe that a reduction in respite care coverage to 600 hours per year will assist in ensuring that the impact of the budget crisis is distributed in a fair and equitable manner across all segments of the State's Medicaid population.