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DSS Asks HHS For Flexibility to Help with COVID-19 Efforts in South Dakota

PIERRE – The South Dakota Department of Social Services (DSS) requested federal authority today to provide flexibility for South Dakota Medicaid recipients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DSS requested authority to make the changes from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) through an 1135 waiver. The waivers run across the Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) administration.

"This waiver is a critical action that will allow the Department of Social Services the flexibility that is needed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic hitting South Dakota," said DSS Cabinet Secretary Laurie Gill. "We need to maximize every opportunity to fight this outbreak, and I know these steps will be immensely helpful for our medical providers and ultimately the people of South Dakota."

The request would allow flexibility for things like:

- Waiving certain administrative requirements for providers;
- Staffing requirements at nursing homes and other health care facilities;
- Allowing facilities such as nursing homes, hospitals, intermediate care facilities, and psychiatric residential treatment facilities to provide services in an alternative setting and for the services to be covered and reimbursed by Medicaid;
- Allowing certain hospitals to exceed bed limits and length of stay requirements; and,
- Allowing Medicaid to pay for telehealth services including office, hospital, and other visits furnished via telehealth across South Dakota and including in patient's places of residence whether provided by doctors, nurse practitioners, clinical psychologists, and licensed clinical social workers, or other provider types.

CMS' response will impact South Dakota Medicaid's ability to provide additional flexibility.

"We need to be nimble and move quickly with these changes," Gill said. "We are utilizing every resource available to us to help protect the health and well-being of every South Dakotan."

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NOTE: A copy of the full waiver request letter is attached to this release.

The South Dakota Department of Social Services is dedicated to strengthening and supporting individuals and families by promoting cost effective and comprehensive services in connection with our partners that foster independent and healthy families. For more information, please visit dss.sd.gov.