School-Based Claiming Services Section Alternative Format Frequently Asked Questions

The following frequently asked questions (FAQs) about Alternative Formats are organized into four categories:

- General Information
- Alternative Format Request Requirement Plan
- Data Match Output File
- Alternative Format Selection Application (AFSA)

These FAQs support Policy and Procedure Letters (PPL) 21-017R and 23-004R.

General Information

1. **What is an Alternative Format?**

   An Alternative Format is the conversion of program documents into another form to allow all qualified members of the public with a disability to effectively communicate and participate in public programs, services, or activities.

2. **What are the alternative formats available?**

   The standard Alternative Format options are large print, audio CD, data CD, and Braille. Below are descriptions of each format:
   - Large print: Large (20-point) size Arial font.
   - Audio CD: Provides the ability to hear notices and information. Files in the CD are not encrypted.
   - Data CD: This allows for the use of computer software to read notices and other written information. Files in the CD are not encrypted.
   - Braille: Uses raised-dots that can be read with fingers.

   There are also non-standard Alternative Formats that members can request by calling the Alternative Format Selection (AFS) Helpline at 1-833-284-0040, including but not limited to:
   - Encrypted Audio CD: Provides the ability to hear notices and information. Files or Medi-Cal notices on the CD are protected with a password.

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- Encrypted Data CD: This allows for the use of computer software to read notices and other written information. Files or Medi-Cal notices on the CD are protected with a password.

3. **To whom do Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) need to provide Alternative Format?**

   LEAs must provide auxiliary aids and services to ensure that all qualified members of the public with disabilities, including Medi-Cal members, can effectively communicate and participate in Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) public programs, services, and/or activities, which includes making program documents available in Alternative Formats (e.g., braille, large font, audio recording).

4. **Do LEAs need to provide Alternative Format to parents also?**

   Public agencies must also provide auxiliary aids and services to a parent, guardian, or authorized representative with whom it is appropriate if said individual is identified as the member's authorized representative, or it is someone with whom it is appropriate to communicate (e.g., a disabled parent of a member).

5. **What documents need to be converted to Alternative Format?**

   Critical and important written program documents that impact eligibility, enrollment, and benefits, such as forms, letters, and notices, need to be converted to Alternative Format.

6. **Who should convert/translate forms?**

   For forms developed or "owned" by a DHCS internal program, the program that owns the form is responsible for Alternative Format conversion and threshold language translation. For forms not owned by a DHCS internal program, the owning agency would be responsible for conversions/translations.

7. **Whom do LEAs contact for converting DHCS-owned forms or documents into Alternative Formats?**

   Contact the program that owns the form. For Medi-Cal applications, contact your county's Health and Human Services Agency.

   Although the DHCS program is responsible for converting the forms or documents, LEAs are responsible for the production of the Alternative Format.

8. **Does written communication need to consider both Alternative Format and language preferences?**

Yes. Written communications need to consider written language preference, i.e. if a member's alternative format preference is a large print and written language preference is Spanish, then written communications to the member should be in Spanish and large print.

9. Can LEAs contract with an outside organization to convert documents to Alternative Formats?

Yes, LEAs may contract for Alternative Format conversions/translations for documents that the LEAs own.

10. Will DHCS provide funding for LEAs to convert and/or produce the documents in Alternative Format?

DHCS will not provide funding for Alternative Format document or form conversion purposes.

11. Who would provide oversight?

Each provider has signed a Provider Participation Agreement Addendum regarding Alternative Format compliance. The addendum requires Local Educational Consortia (LECs) and LEAs to comply with all regulations and guidelines related to the ADA and requires the development and production of Alternative Format requests. This oversight falls within your area of responsibility.

12. How can an Alternative Format request be recorded?

The following methods can be used to record requests:
- Medi-Cal members can input their request directly into the online system https://afs.dhcs.ca.gov/.
- Medi-Cal members can report their request to LEC, LEA, or their subcontractor's staff who may input the members' requests into the system.
- LEC, LEA, subcontractor staff, or the member can call 1-833-284-0040 and go through the prompt to input the format request.

13. Are LECs and LEAs required to collect/track/store the Alternative Format selection?

LECs and LEAs are not required to collect/track/store the Alternative Format selection. LECs and LEAs should have some way to know when a member has made an Alternative Format request so that the requested format may be provided for materials regarding DHCS programs on an ongoing basis.

14. **How do I receive information about the member's Alternative Format selection?**

    LEAs may obtain the member's Alternative Format selection either from the Alternative Format Selection Application (AFSA) system or the Data Match Output File.

15. **Are we required to share the Benefits Identification Card (BIC) number of the members?**

    LEAs are not required to know the students' BIC numbers. BIC numbers are only needed when:
    - Assisting the student and/or the authorized representative to enter the Alternative Format Selection in the AFSA system.
    - Searching for the student and/or the authorized representative's Alternative Format selection.

    In the above scenarios, LEAs should be able to get the BIC number from the member and/or the authorized representative.

Alternative Format Request Requirement Plan

16. **What do I need to do for the Alternative Format requirement?**

    In accordance with PPLs 21-017R and 23-004R, LECs and LEAs must develop a plan to meet these Alternative Format requirements by August 1, 2023.

17. **Do LEAs need to send their plans to DHCS by August 1, 2023?**

    No, LEAs do not need to send their plans to DHCS. However, a plan must be developed by August 1, 2023, and LEAs must store and maintain the plan within their audit file for oversight.

18. **Can LEAs share plans or does each LEA need their own plan?**

    Each LEA will need to develop and maintain its own plan. Plans may be similar or identical as long as it aligns with each LEAs' process to ensure that Alternative Format is provided to Medi-Cal members.

19. **Do LEAs need to develop a plan even if they do not have Alternative Format requests at this time?**

    Yes, all LEAs will need to develop a plan to meet these Alternative Format request requirements.

20. **Can DHCS share a sample plan and/or a template with the LEAs?**
DHCS will not be sharing a sample plan or a template with LEAs. However, the [Guidance Document](#) includes points to consider when developing a plan.

21. **Are LEAs required to include all components from the Guidance Document in their plan?**

    No, LEAs are not required to include all components from the Guidance Document in their plan. The Guidance Document contains elements that LEAs may consider when developing a plan to meet the Alternative Format Request Requirement.

22. **Can LEAs incorporate language from the PPLs and the Guidance Document into their plans?**

    Yes, LEAs may use language from the PPLs and the Guidance Document in their plan where it is suitable.

23. **Is the Alternative Format plan applicable to Medi-Cal related materials only or does it need to extend to educational materials also?**

    The Alternative Format requirement applies to services, including but not limited to, Medi-Cal and other programs that DHCS administers in whole or in part through partnerships with other entities. Policies, procedures, or plans that are already in place may be extended to meet the requirement to provide Alternative Formats for DHCS.

    While this federal requirement likely applies to educational materials as well, this plan only focuses on sharing DHCS-related communications.

24. **What does continuously monitoring the effectiveness of the Alternative Format plan look like?**

    LECs and LEAs will need to determine the logistics of keeping the contents of the plans current, accurate, and in effect. DHCS wants to ensure that plans achieve their goals and that Alternative Format is provided appropriately.

25. **What type of documentation would be requested in the event of an audit?**

    LECs and LEAs must store and maintain the plan within their audit file for oversight. DHCS reserves the right to request a copy of the plan at any time after August 1, 2023.

Data Match Output File

26. What is the Data Match Output File?

The list of students enrolled in the LEA (data match input file) is matched against the Medi-Cal Eligibility Data System (MEDS) to produce a data match output file that identifies students who are Medi-Cal members.

27. How do you get the Data Match Output File?

The data match process is used to get Medi-Cal enrollment information for the Medi-Cal Eligibility Ratio (MER) calculation, to identify the Benefits Identification Card (BIC) number for submitting claims, and to determine if an Alternative Format has been requested.

For School-Based Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (SMAA), the Data Match Output File is managed by the LEC. For the Local Educational Agency Medi-Cal Billing Option Program (LEA BOP), the LEA vendor frequently manages the Data Match Output File, or else the LEA conducts the data match process.

28. What information does the Data Match Output File contain?

The Data Match Output Files include information from the MEDS and identify eligibility information for Medi-Cal members, including the Alternative Format selection.

To locate Alternative Format information from the Data Match Output File:
- For LEA BOP, Alternative Format information can be located in spaces 263-303.
- For SMAA, Alternative Format information can be located in the column labeled "Alternative Format".

Alternative Format Selection Application (AFSA)

29. What is the Alternative Format Selection Application (AFSA)?

DHCS uses the Alternative Format Selection Application (AFSA) system for Alternative Format purposes. LEAs may use the system to search for a member's Alternative Format selection or record an Alternative Format request.

30. How can LEAs access the AFSA system?

Log on to https://afs.dhcs.ca.gov/ and enter the member's First/Last Name, BIC number, and date of birth.

31. Which Alternative Format request should be considered if there is a verbal request that differs from the selection in the AFSA system?

Alternative Format selection in AFSA should be considered. Members may make arrangements with LEAs to provide another effective means of communication.