AARP Public Policy Institute Spotlight Report:
“The Role of Medicaid Managed Long-Term Services and Supports (MLTSS) during the COVID-19 Pandemic”

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MLTSS Intensive
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Role of Medicaid MLTSS during COVID-19 Pandemic

- States increasingly reliant on managed care as the delivery system for providing long-term services and supports to Medicaid beneficiaries
- COVID-19 pandemic severely tested the ability of states and their MLTSS plans to meet the needs of Medicaid beneficiaries, particularly for individuals in nursing homes
- Spotlight Report, co-authored with Susan Reinhard, explored the challenges faced by Medicaid MLTSS plans as well as innovative approaches implemented to address these challenges
- Lessons learned can help better prepare for future health emergencies as well as point the way to other potential improvements in long-term services and supports
Methodology

• Findings of the report are based on interviews with more than 25 individuals
  • State Medicaid Directors or their LTSS leads in six states (AZ, FL, PA, TN, VA and WI)
  • Cross-section of representatives from both national and local MLTSS plans, national association representatives, LTSS thought leaders and consumer advocates
  • Interviews conducted during 1st quarter of 2021
• Not designed to provide a comprehensive inventory, but an intentional cross-section of stakeholders who could provide insights into what was happening on the ground as the pandemic unfolded
• Variability in Medicaid MLTSS programs across states
• Clear, frequent communication was essential
  • Lead role played by State Medicaid agencies
  • Communication was a two-way street
    • Unique perspective of national plans as pandemic unfolded
    • Clinical expertise that could support state decision-making
    • Iterative process that evolved over time
Key Themes

• MLTSS plans reported responding to real time needs as the pandemic unfolded
  • Deployment of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
  • In some instances, providing clinical support to nursing homes

• MLTSS plans had difficulties gaining access to nursing home residents to perform care coordination responsibilities
  • Plans reported on efforts to overcome this barrier
    • Standardized schedules and virtual process for engagement
    • Provision of IT technology to care managers/residents
    • Integration with nursing home clinical record systems
Key Themes

• MLTSS plans placed particular emphasis on the needs of people receiving HCBS Services during the pandemic
  • Top priority at outset to supply PPE to direct care workers and providers
  • Plans reported on efforts to address barriers to in-person meetings
    • Immediate phone or virtual outreach to identify needs, reconfigure services as needed, check availability of staffing, test back-up plans and provide additional supports to members
    • Predictive analytical tools used by several plans to monitor care of members and the provider network
  • Significant attention to organizing and educating workforce on the front lines
Key Themes

• CMS emergency waiver flexibilities were critical to supporting state/MLTSS plans response
  • Telehealth flexibilities noted as particularly important by almost every respondent
  • Increased use of family caregivers
  • Modification of existing services or addition of new services
  • Services provided in expanded settings
  • Temporary or one-time direct rate enhancements

• By most accounts, the MLTSS plans responded quickly in adopting these flexibilities
Key Themes

• Some plans engaged in additional initiatives beyond usual contract requirements

  • Efforts to address workforce shortage
    • Advancing States Connect to Care Jobs registry

  • Initiatives to address social determinants of health
    • Food a key priority for individuals isolated in their homes
    • Housing
Lessons Learned: Replicating Success and Making Improvements

COVID experience suggests ways to better prepare for future Public Health Emergencies and make longer-term improvements in the Medicaid LTSS System

- Clearly define roles for state agencies/MLTSS plans
- Enhanced clinical support to nursing homes/other providers
- Opportunities to strengthen provider contracting
- Embracing telehealth
- Evaluation of waiver flexibilities
- Address data gaps experienced during the pandemic
- Review and update emergency back-up plans
- Designate HCBS workforce as “essential”
• Link to full report: https://www.aarp.org/ppi/info-2021/the-role-of-medicaid-managed-long-term-services-and-supports.html

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