

Medicaid Transformation Project

COVID-19 extension year

Today, the COVID-19 pandemic strains our health care workforce and system, essential workers, our families and communities, income, employment, available resources, and much more. It has uncovered structural inequities in our health care system and intensified our uncertainty—dramatically affecting vulnerable populations and the providers who serve them.

In only its fourth year, the Washington State Medicaid Transformation Project (MTP) is well positioned to mitigate the challenges of COVID-19. MTP initiatives are demonstrating their capacity to serve communities, including vulnerable populations, during a crippling pandemic.

Below are some response efforts of MTP Initiatives 1-5. To learn more about MTP, [read our one-pager](#).

Responding to COVID-19

Initiative 1

Through their community-based work, Accountable Communities of Health (ACH) have developed a unique foundation to respond to and understand emerging community needs. Examples of ACH work under MTP includes supporting the integration of physical and behavioral health care, preventing opiate misuse, and supporting community organizations that help people with chronic illnesses. In addition, ACHs play a key role in COVID-19 relief efforts by:

- Helping individuals receive food and health care.
- Assisting small providers to shift to telehealth.
- Distributing personal protective equipment, including 4.4 million masks.
- Partnering with local health jurisdictions and community organizations to alleviate uncertainty by informing community providers and families about the virus, testing, new state flexibilities, and federal relief.

To learn more about ACHs and MTP, [read our one-pager](#).

Indian Health Care Providers (IHCPs) also used MTP funding to accelerate the shift to telehealth services, so they could continue providing services when clinics were closed.

Initiative 2

This initiative focuses on supporting older adults—a population deeply affected by COVID-19—and family caregivers. Initiative 2 continues to expand care options for older people amidst this pandemic, while keeping them at home where risk of exposure is less than in congregate care facilities. Services, such as home-delivered meals, personal care, respite care, and errands to the grocery store and pharmacy allow at-risk populations to follow public health guidelines to stay home.

Initiative 3

Foundational Community Supports (FCS) promotes recovery and self-sufficiency for Medicaid beneficiaries with behavioral health needs and other health risks by finding and maintaining housing and competitive employment. Throughout COVID-19, FCS continue to support the transition to telehealth services by distributing cell phones, lending laptops, and dispensing Zoom licenses.

Initiatives 4 & 5

Initiative 4 provides additional federal MTP funding for expanded substance use disorder treatment in participating health care facilities. This financial support has continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Initiative 5, if approved, will support the development of extended services in participating facilities for enrollees with serious mental health conditions.





Requesting a COVID-19 extension year

MTP's transformation efforts and support of local communities—which include COVID-19 response—depends on a two-part request:

- Approval from Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for an MTP COVID-19 extension year.
- Authority from the Governor and the Washington State Legislature to increase funds up to our CMS spending limits to support ACH activities.

Both the extension and increase in funds will allow Washington State to continue our COVID-19 relief efforts through each of the MTP initiatives. In addition, both will further the continued implementation of MTP's transformational goals and progress toward value-based purchasing. The extension would be a sixth MTP year, ending December 31, 2022.

Maximizing available funding up to the CMS spending limit

- By lifting the state expenditure cap on Initiative 1, ACHs play a dual role: provide relief for COVID-19 and continue activities that transform health and wellness. Because of this role, HCA has proposed lifting the state expenditure cap on available local and federal funds to accommodate the COVID extension year. Communities in our state would then receive an additional investment of \$139 million.

If the expenditure cap is lifted, then IHCPs would receive additional MTP funds to further their transformational activities in the extension year.

- Initiatives 2 and 3 would continue to provide services under existing authority. Unspent program funds because of delayed implementation or lower-than-expected enrollment from prior years would be available to provide services in the extension year.

Other benefits of the extension year

- With vulnerability on the rise, MTP will continue to convene community partners to advance the implementation of integrated care, and secure the linkages between a person's physical and behavioral health.
- In a time of disruption, the collective MTP initiatives further the promise of delivery system reforms and innovative value-based purchasing, and the ability to fully evaluate their impact upon our communities.
- Initiative 2 services help older adults receive essential services while staying in their homes—a smart option that reduces exposure to COVID-19 and results in savings for the state budget—would continue to operate in the COVID-19 extension year.
- An additional year of FCS enrollment during the extension would help provide housing and employment stability for people with behavioral health and other long-term care needs during a period of economic hardship. [Preliminary data](#) demonstrated significant improvements in the lives of enrollees, and another year of FCS data would help assess the success of supportive housing and supported employment services.

Initial discussions among federal partners advised Washington State to explore the option of a COVID-19 extension year. We've begun developing the formal application for an extension, which is due to CMS by the end of 2020. HCA submitted a decision package for consideration to fund the extension year in the Governor's 2021-2023 biennial budget. The decision package requested authority to fund additional ACH activities up to the CMS spending limit.

What's next?

The decision package and application for extension will launch formal discussions with the Legislature and CMS at the beginning of 2021. HCA will coordinate discussions with Tribal governments, MTP partners and stakeholders, and state agencies. If the decision package and application are approved by mid-2021, there would be enough time to plan for and implement a 2022 COVID-19 extension year.

By extending MTP, and drawing upon the full potential of local and federal funding, we can deliver coordinated assistance to our communities at a time of high uncertainty.