

Medicaid Managed Care's Important Role for Medically Complex Kids

Nearly 75 million Americans—including half of America's children—depend on Medicaid, including about 6.8 million children with complex medical conditions and disabilities.¹

Medicaid health plans are an essential safety-net for children with complex medical conditions, detecting and preventing the progression of chronic diseases, coordinating services across the continuum of care, and delivering programs targeted to their needs.

Caring for Kids in Action

The examples below highlight the kinds of care coordination efforts used by Medicaid health plans that are having real impacts for real kids across the country. To help kids and their parents navigate the health care system, Medicaid health plans and their care coordinators:

Ensure Needed Care and Supplies

Frankie, a child with spina bifida and infantile scoliosis among other complex medical issues, was enrolled in a Medicaid health plan in Texas. Arthur, a care coordinator with Frankie's new Medicaid health plan, immediately reached out to Frankie's mother to learn more about his needs and her concerns as his primary caregiver.

Arthur learned that Frankie had been waiting for over a year for special equipment to help him stand and move more independently, while other therapies had inexplicably been put on hold.

She could not believe how much was covered for her son's surgery and how hard the care coordinator worked to ensure Frankie received the care and services he needed.

After learning that the durable medical equipment (DME) provider was waiting for a signed order from Frankie's orthopedist, Arthur obtained the needed signature so Frankie could finally receive his mobile standing equipment.

Arthur also worked with Frankie's mother, providers, and the health plan to get the necessary authorizations to resume physical therapy and occupational therapy services.

A few months later, Frankie needed a surgery to treat his scoliosis and spina bifida that was not available in Texas. The only surgeons who could perform the surgery were in Chicago, outside of the provider network. Because of his interactions with Frankie, his mother, and others on the care team, Arthur understood how critical this surgery was. Arthur coordinated approval for the out-of-network surgery and also arranged airfare, meals, and lodging for the trip, all paid for by the Medicaid health plan.

Frankie's mother was without words. She could not believe how much was covered for her son's surgery and how hard the care coordinator worked to ensure Frankie received the care and services he needed.

Provide Transportation Help for Patients and Parents

Twins Jackson and Byron were born prematurely at 33 weeks gestation and admitted to the Neonatal Intensive-Care Unit (NICU) in a New Mexico hospital. Jackson was transported to El Paso Children's Hospital in Texas for more intensive care due to a cleft lip and palate, while his mother and Byron remained at the hospital in New Mexico. Their Medicaid health plan care coordinator,

¹ <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/medicaids-role-for-children-with-special-health-care-needs-a-look-at-eligibility-services-and-spending/>

Vanessa, contacted the mother to complete a Health Risk Assessment and establish a personal relationship.

The mom was overwhelmed because her babies were in NICUs at two different hospitals in two different states. She was feeling the financial and emotional strain of traveling back and forth. Vanessa, the health plan care coordinator, offered her assistance and support, arranging to have the mother's travel to El Paso provided and paid for by the health plan.

The mother was greatly appreciative and remains in contact with Vanessa whenever she feels stressed or overwhelmed with keeping up with her sons' health needs and complex care. With both twins now at home, Vanessa completed a comprehensive needs assessment, arranged for ongoing services, and continues to follow up periodically to make sure Jackson and Byron get the care and services they need to thrive.

Arrange Behavioral Health Support Services

John, a child with severe behavioral issues, enrolled in a Medicaid health plan. John had a history of trauma from physical abuse and had previously been diagnosed with several psychiatric conditions and learning disabilities.

Before joining the health plan, John had received care in six different out-of-state residential treatment centers. John's doctors did not believe he would ever stabilize enough to return home. After the health plan arranged for two months of intensive assessment, John was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. John's health plan care coordinator, Sarah, began discharge planning to bring John back home with the appropriate supports, including two months of weekly meetings and several trials of home visits.

John successfully returned home to his family and began receiving comprehensive services, including applied behavioral analysis therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, medication management, individual and family talk therapy, and participation in a social skills group.

John began attending a carefully selected local charter school with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) built for special education services. It's been six months since John returned home to his family. He hasn't had any further behavioral health hospital admissions; he remains active with his treatment and is making good progress in school.

Make Safe Transitions from Hospital to Home

Six-month-old Eli had been in the Children's Mercy Hospital NICU in Kansas City since birth with complex medical conditions. He was finally ready to go home, and his family was thrilled. However, he had a tracheostomy and needed a ventilator and feeding tube. To facilitate the transition home, Karen, Eli's Medicaid health plan care coordinator, arranged 24/7 skilled nursing support to promote the best outcomes for him and his family.

The availability of licensed practical nurses to provide home care in Kansas City is limited, but Eli's care coordinator, Karen, went above and beyond to arrange the care needed to get him home safely. Karen found a home care agency with a nurse with appropriate expertise and negotiated a reimbursement rate higher than the plan normally pays for home care services. Karen worked with Eli's family to establish the full array of services they needed to keep him at home and improve his quality of life. Eli went home in September and he and his family continue to do well thanks to the creativity and initiative of Eli's Medicaid health plan team.

Our Ongoing Commitment

Medicaid health plans have decades of experience coordinating care for our most vulnerable children with medically complex conditions. They coordinate care across facilities, across town, and even across state lines when necessary. Working with providers and families, dedicated health plan care coordinators are committed to ensuring every child receives the care they need.

Medicaid health plan care coordinators help kids and their families navigate the health care system. They work collaboratively with a child's whole health care team, including, parents, primary care providers, specialists, social workers, and community resource providers. They arrange for services, monitor care, and provide support for kids and their families. Care coordinators help kids get the right care at the right time at the right place.