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May 14, 2019

Karen L. Smith, MD, MPH
Director and State Public Health Officer
California Department of Public Health
1615 Capitol Avenue
PO Box 997377, MS 0500
Sacramento, California 95899-7377

Re: AB 577 (Eggman): Health care coverage: postpartum period

Dear Dr. Smith:

The California Conference of Local Health Officers (CCLHO) voted at the CCLHO Board meeting on May 1, 2019 to take a Support recommendation on AB 577 (Eggman), a bill that would extend Medi-Cal eligibility for a pregnant individual who is receiving health care coverage under the Medi-Cal program, or another specified program, and who has been diagnosed with a maternal mental health condition, for a period of one year following the last day of the individual's pregnancy if the individual complies with certain requirements. The bill would define "maternal mental health condition" for purposes of the bill.

Many postpartum individuals lose their Medi-Cal benefits at 60 days after delivery, eliminating their ability to receive care for longer term conditions including mental health diagnoses. Perinatal mental health is of increasing concern because of the high prevalence of depression and anxiety during the perinatal period and the resulting long-term implications of delayed, inconsistent, or absent treatment. Maternal mental health conditions influence the well-being of mothers, children, families, and communities. Low-income women and women of racial/ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by maternal mental health disorders, as they face unique barriers to diagnosis and treatment. While many of these women may already be enrolled in Medi-Cal, others, who do not meet Medi-Cal's income eligibility, are not. Disruption in coverage could break the continuity of care and potentially halt treatment altogether. This is unhealthy for the mother and the baby. Extending Medi-Cal benefits for pregnant and postpartum women will ensure that they continue to receive important pregnancy-related and postpartum health care, including mental health care.

CCLHO was established in statute in 1947 to advise the California Department of Health Services (now California Department of Public Health), other departments, boards, commissions, and officials of federal, state and local agencies, the Legislature and other organizations on all matters affecting health. CCLHO membership consists of all legally appointed physician health officers in California's 61 city and county jurisdictions.

Should you have any questions, please contact me by email at roldham@placer.ca.gov or by phone at (530) 745-3121. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Oldham, MD, MSHA
President, California Conference of Local Health Officers