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Assembly Bill AB 654

Incentive-Based, Supplemental Payment to Improve Access to Care for Children

Background

There are nearly 4,500 children statewide with severe long term, complex and catastrophic health needs that are eligible for Medi-Cal in-home nursing care. In-home skilled nursing care allows these children to be safely discharged from expensive ICU-level hospitals and back into their homes at a fraction of the cost to the state.

However, in the last decade, barriers to accessing quality in-home nurse care for these children have increased. Out-of-date reimbursement models and difficulty recruiting nurses with the appropriate skill set at common Medi-Cal pay rates have resulted in longer hospital stays, frequent hospital readmissions, waiting lists and even no access to in-home nursing care at all. Without the access to skilled in-home nursing, the state is unnecessarily spending limited resources and preventing children from being at home with their families.

The Medi-Cal rate is significantly below what surrounding states pay and more than 50% below the average commercial rate making it increasingly difficult to find affordable care for these families due to home health agencies increasingly not accepting Medi-Cal patients. Additionally there are major decreases in agencies serving Medi-Cal patients and out of those decreasing numbers not all are able to provide the amount of necessary hours.

Current Law

There is already an incentive program to gain more in-home nurses for geriatric patients. Health and Safety Code § 9 states that "it is the intent of the Legislature to promote more and better-qualified

medical care for geriatric patients by increasing training opportunities for geriatric nurse practitioners and geriatric clinical nurse specialists and by providing an incentive for nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists to practice in skilled nursing facilities or other facilities providing care primarily to geriatric patients". Adding a similar program or incentive for in-home nurses for pediatrics would greatly benefit the gap between available care and patients in need. A previous attempt to improve access to care for medically fragile children was unsuccessful (SB 1401 in 2016).

This Bill

This legislation would require the DHCS to establish an incentive-based, supplement payment program for home health agencies that treats children who are receiving continuous nursing care or private duty nursing services at home through the Medi-Cal program. Specifically this legislation would:

- Create an innovative program that would increase payments to HHA if they can improve access and care for children
- Encourage the DHCS to improve access by considering a supplement payment based on acuity of patient
- Ensure accountability by requiring a report to the legislature on the efficacy of program

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