

# **NUECES COUNTY HOSPITAL DISTRICT**

## **Briefing Paper**

**SUBJECT:** Potential Use of YourTexasBenefits.com to Facilitate Enrollment in the Nueces Aid Program

### **Purpose**

To brief the Board of Managers regarding the potential use of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission's YourTexasBenefits.com integrated benefits portal as an additional pathway to facilitate enrollment in the Nueces Aid Program.

### **Background**

The Nueces Aid Program is the District's local indigent health care program for Nueces County residents who do not qualify for other state or federal medical assistance. The program operates as the District's implementation of the County Indigent Health Care Program under Chapter 61 of the Texas Health and Safety Code and provides hospital, clinical, pharmacy, and primary care services to eligible residents.

Enrollment is currently administered independently by the District through its own online and paper application processes. Applicants must provide information and documentation concerning residency, household composition, income, resources, other coverage, and identity. Eligibility is determined after the required documentation is received.

### **Current Enrollment Process**

The District currently accepts Nueces Aid applications through its online enrollment system and by paper application. Applicants are responsible for separately gathering and submitting supporting documentation even when similar information has previously been provided to or verified by another governmental benefits program.

There is presently no direct connection between YourTexasBenefits.com and the Nueces Aid Program. Consequently, an individual who applies for Medicaid through the state portal and is denied must separately identify the Nueces Aid Program and initiate another enrollment process with the District.

### **Potential YourTexasBenefits.com Pathway**

YourTexasBenefits.com is the State's integrated benefits portal for programs including Medicaid, SNAP, CHIP, and TANF. A Medicaid application submitted through the portal collects substantially the same applicant information used in determining Nueces Aid eligibility, including identity and address, county of residence, household composition, income, assets and resources, insurance status, Social Security number, and Medicaid eligibility status.

The briefing identifies photo identification as the principal Nueces Aid documentation requirement not collected through YourTexasBenefits.com. This requirement could be addressed through a supplemental verification step rather than requiring an applicant to repeat the entire application process.

### **Enrollment Pathway Models**

The briefing identifies three potential approaches for using YourTexasBenefits.com information to facilitate Nueces Aid enrollment. The first would provide for automatic referral following a Medicaid denial, with applicant consent, allowing verified eligibility information to be transmitted to the District and used to initiate a Nueces Aid application.

A second approach would establish a direct County Indigent Health Care Program intake pathway within YourTexasBenefits.com, allowing an applicant to initiate a Nueces Aid application through the state portal without first completing a Medicaid application.

A third approach would use an administrative coordination arrangement under existing authority. Under this approach, the District could accept income, household, and other information already verified through

a YourTexasBenefits.com Medicaid application to satisfy corresponding Nueces Aid documentation requirements. Unlike the first two approaches, this model would not depend upon an automated data-transfer system.

## **Potential Administrative Benefits**

Use of verified YourTexasBenefits.com information could reduce duplication in the enrollment process by allowing information already collected and verified by HHSC to be used for Nueces Aid eligibility purposes. This could reduce the amount of documentation applicants must submit separately and lessen administrative processing associated with collecting and verifying duplicative information.

The approach could also provide a more direct connection between Medicaid ineligibility and the local indigent health care program. Medicaid-denied Nueces County residents whose income and resources fall within Nueces Aid standards could be more readily identified and directed to the District's enrollment process.

## **Eligibility Considerations**

The Nueces Aid Program maintains eligibility standards established by the District under its statutory authority, including an income limit of 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines and a resource limit established by the District. These standards differ from the minimum eligibility requirements applicable to County Indigent Health Care Programs generally.

Use of YourTexasBenefits.com would therefore function as an enrollment and information-sharing pathway rather than as a replacement for the District's eligibility standards or responsibility for making final Nueces Aid eligibility determinations.

## **Legal and Operational Considerations**

Implementation of the more integrated enrollment approaches would require coordination with HHSC and, for the automatic-referral and direct-portal models described in the briefing, statutory changes contemplated as part of a broader County Indigent Health Care Program streamlining framework.

Any data-sharing arrangement would require applicant consent. The briefing contemplates affirmative authorization for the sharing of applicant information with the applicable local program administrator and provides that refusal to consent would not affect eligibility for other benefit programs.

Operational issues would include establishing data-transfer or documentation procedures, confirming how previously verified information would be accepted by the District, addressing the remaining photo-identification requirement, coordinating referral and applicant-contact processes, and maintaining the District's responsibility for final eligibility determinations.

## **Potential Phased Approach**

The briefing identifies a phased approach under which the District could initially pursue administrative coordination using existing authority while more integrated portal and automatic-referral mechanisms are considered through the legislative and state implementation processes.

Such an approach could allow the District to begin reducing duplicative documentation and enrollment barriers without waiting for development of a fully integrated state-local data pathway.

## **Fiscal and Administrative Impact**

The briefing does not establish a specific fiscal impact or funding requirement. Potential effects would depend upon the enrollment model ultimately pursued, the extent of HHSC coordination or system development required, implementation arrangements, and any changes in enrollment volume or administrative workload.

Potential administrative benefits include reduced duplicative data collection and verification, a more streamlined application process, and improved identification of individuals who may qualify for the Nueces Aid Program following Medicaid denial.

## **Board Consideration**

The Board is being asked to receive and discuss the briefing regarding the potential use of YourTexasBenefits.com to further facilitate enrollment in the Nueces Aid Program. The briefing provides a framework for considering administrative coordination under existing authority as well as potential future integration with the state benefits portal.

## **Summary**

YourTexasBenefits.com collects much of the information required to determine Nueces Aid eligibility and therefore presents an opportunity to streamline enrollment by reusing verified applicant information and reducing duplicative documentation. The briefing identifies administrative and potential statutory pathways ranging from immediate coordination using existing authority to future automatic referral and direct portal integration. Under any approach, the District would retain its eligibility standards and responsibility for determining enrollment in the Nueces Aid Program.