

NAVIGATING THE RYAN WHITE PROGRAM & MEDI-CAL

Consumer Caucus Listening Session & Follow-Up Survey

July 10, 2025



Why we held this conversation

The Consumer Caucus hosted this listening session to hear directly from people living with HIV, providers, case managers, enrollment workers, and others involved in helping clients navigate the Ryan White Program and Medi-Cal. The discussion focused on enrollment and renewal, continuity of care, barriers consumers face, and ways the two systems can work better together.

What we heard

The process can take a lot of time and hands-on support.

Participants described Medi-Cal enrollment and renewal as paperwork-heavy and time-sensitive. Benefits staff may spend significant time helping clients gather documents, communicate with DPSS, and meet deadlines.

Digital access and literacy can be barriers.

Some clients may not have the computer skills needed to complete online applications or use benefits portals. Participants also described challenges for older adults and people with limited reading or writing skills.

Income documentation does not always fit people's lives.

Some clients are paid in ways that do not produce traditional pay stubs or direct-deposit records, which can make proof-of-income requirements harder to meet.

Benefits Specialty Services are an important bridge.

Participants viewed Benefits Specialty Services as an important connection between Ryan White services, Medi-Cal, SSI, and other benefits. They also identified a need for stronger Medi-Cal enrollment and renewal training.

Legal help needs to come in early.

Participants emphasized recognizing when a benefits denial or appeal needs legal support and making the referral before a deadline is missed.

Having Medi-Cal does not necessarily end the need for Ryan White services.

Participants noted that people with Medi-Cal may still use eligible Ryan White-funded support services when Ryan White is the payer of last resort.

Trust and respectful treatment matter.

Participants described frustration with some system interactions and emphasized that respectful communication, trusted information, and showing care can affect whether clients stay engaged.

“Don’t wait on the client, engage with the client.”

A strong message from the listening session

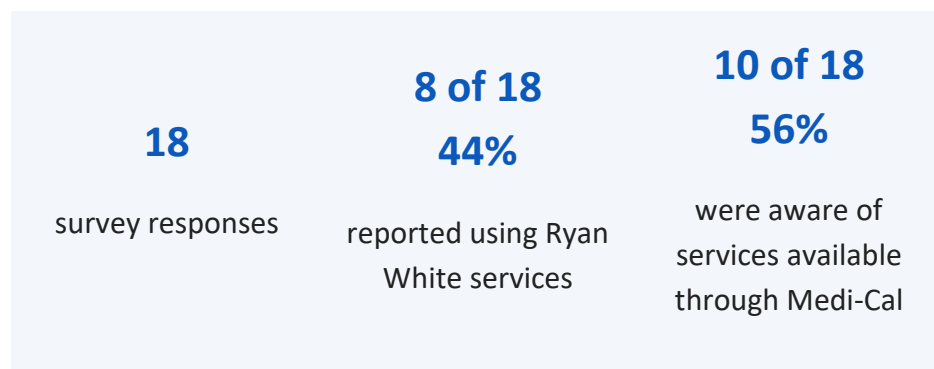
What participants said could help

- Train Benefits Specialty Services staff on Medi-Cal enrollment and renewal procedures.
- Give staff clear guidance about when to involve legal services.
- Use plain-language and multilingual information.
- Send enrollment and renewal reminders early and through more than one method.
- Help clients use BenefitsCal and access online notices when appropriate.
- Use the DPSS authorized representative process when it can help staff assist a client.
- Provide in-person or community-based enrollment help for people who need more hands-on support.

- Help clients build skills to navigate parts of the process independently when that is realistic.
- Improve coordination among Ryan White providers, Benefits Specialty Services, Medi-Cal enrollment systems, DPSS, and legal services.
- Prepare for Medi-Cal changes that could increase demand for Ryan White services.

Follow-up survey

The follow-up survey received 18 responses. The survey was not limited to people who attended the listening session.



Survey comments reinforced several themes from the session, including the value of benefits specialists and care coordinators, confusion around eligibility and transitions, the need for plain-language information, and the importance of hands-on or in-person assistance for some people.

What came through most clearly

Consumers should not have to navigate Ryan White and Medi-Cal largely on their own. The feedback points to the need for early engagement, clear information, trained benefits staff, timely legal referrals, in-person help when needed, and stronger coordination across systems.