

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Work in progress: Audit description

Medicaid Lead Testing: Following up on selected issues

Lead exposure remains a serious public health issue. Exposure to even small amounts of lead can cause consequential and lifelong harm, especially for very young children because their developing bodies are more likely to incorporate toxic substances into tissue, teeth and bones. There is no safe level of lead in the body, and it remains a risk even in Western states like Washington.

Medicaid (in Washington called Apple Health) imposes requirements that all enrolled children under the age of 6 be tested for exposure to this substance through blood lead screenings. However, our [2023 performance audit](#) found that when Washington was compared to six other Western states, it had the highest percentage of children with elevated blood lead levels, yet tested children for lead exposure at the second-to-lowest rate in the group. Of even greater concern, most children enrolled in Medicaid and at the highest risk for exposure were not tested. Overall, only 26% of these children received at least one of the federally required tests between 1 year and 6 years old, increasing the risk that some will not get the follow-up care they need.

The Health Care Authority (HCA), as the state Medicaid agency, is responsible for ensuring the state meets all federal program requirements. This includes ensuring that all enrolled patients receive required tests or services. The 2023 audit made multiple recommendations to HCA to address the need for increased monitoring of health care providers and managed care organizations; to improve provider understanding of Medicaid blood lead testing requirements; and to work with the Department of Health to ensure providers receive clear, consistent guidance that can help increase testing rates.

Preliminary scope and objectives

This audit will follow up on the previous audit's findings related to HCA and determine whether the agency has made progress in addressing recommendations around guidance and monitoring. This audit seeks to answer the following question:

- What steps has the Health Care Authority taken to address recommendations made in our 2023 lead testing audit?



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