



# THE RECOVERY INCENTIVES PROGRAM: CALIFORNIA'S CONTINGENCY MANAGEMENT BENEFIT

MEDI-CAL TRANSFORMATION

## The Issue

- » California is grappling with a persistent and shifting substance use disorder crisis. Deaths related to cocaine, methamphetamine and other stimulants have soared in the past decade; in 2021, 65% of drug-related overdose deaths involved stimulants, compared to 22% in 2011.
- » Contingency management is the most effective evidence-based approach to treating stimulant use disorder. The treatment has demonstrated robust outcomes, including reduction or cessation of drug use and longer retention in treatment.
- » California is the first state in the nation to cover contingency management as a Medicaid benefit and to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment at scale.

## The Intervention: Contingency Management through the Medi-Cal Recovery Incentives Program

To expand access to evidence-based treatment for stimulant use disorder and address the substance use disorder crisis, California is implementing Medi-Cal coverage of contingency management services in 24 participating pilot counties covering 88% of the Medi-Cal population through the [Recovery Incentives Program](#). Unlike opioids, there are no FDA-approved medications to treat the use of methamphetamines, cocaine, or other stimulants. Contingency management, however, is the most effective evidence-based treatment for stimulant use disorder and has been shown to improve treatment outcomes, including the decrease or cessation of drug use, and longer participation in treatment than other treatment options.

California is the first state in the nation to offer contingency management as a Medicaid benefit through the Recovery Incentives Program. The program uses evidence-based clinical protocols that deliver earned incentives to patients who achieve target treatment outcomes such as not using stimulants. Earning incentives such as a small gift card can help trigger the brain's reward system in the absence of stimulant use. Over time, earning incentives can help support and reinforce recovery. Restrictions are placed on the incentives so they cannot be used to purchase cannabis, tobacco, alcohol, or lottery tickets. Recovery Incentives Program participants are also offered complementary substance use disorder services, such as individual and group counseling and peer supports, to support their paths to recovery.



## Faces of Medi-Cal's Transformation: Meet Jamie\*

Jamie began experimenting with substance use when he was a teenager. He has struggled with cocaine misuse and addiction over the years and tried multiple treatment programs, but recently woke up in the emergency department after unknowingly using cocaine mixed with fentanyl. The emergency department physician referred Jamie to a Medi-Cal provider offering the Recovery Incentives Program. It allows him to earn incentives for not using meth, cocaine, or other stimulants. Jamie is also encouraged to participate in group counseling and to connect with a Peer Support Specialist. He meets with his contingency management coordinator twice each week to take a drug test. Every time his test comes back negative for stimulants, he earns a small gift card. The financial reward and the support of his counseling group and peers with lived experience each week helps Jamie stay motivated to avoid using cocaine.

(\*A hypothetical individual based on a composite of cases.)

## Recovery Incentives Program in the Context of Medi-Cal Transformation

The Recovery Incentives Program increases access to new evidence-based treatments for Californians living with substance use disorder. Starting in 2023, the program is available to members living with stimulant use disorder in participating counties, in outpatient, intensive outpatient, and Narcotic Treatment Program settings. As part of the program, eligible Medi-Cal members participate in a structured 24-week outpatient program, followed by at least six months of additional recovery support services. Participants meet with a trained contingency management coordinator twice weekly for the first 12 weeks of the program, then weekly for weeks 13 to 24 to complete a drug test. Participants receive a small gift card each time they test negative for stimulants and can earn up to \$599 per year in incentives.

The Recovery Incentives Program will be evaluated using claims and survey data by a team at the University of California, Los Angeles to understand its effectiveness in participating counties.

## The Positive Impact of Medi-Cal's Coverage of Contingency Management

Medi-Cal coverage of contingency management services through the Recovery Incentives Program supports members living with stimulant use disorder throughout California. As the most effective evidence-based treatment for stimulant use disorder, contingency management services nationally have shown consistently positive results, including longer retention in treatment and reductions in drug use compared to other treatments. Implementing the Recovery Incentives Program will help to address the ongoing substance use disorder crisis in California and its disparate impact on marginalized communities, especially Black and American Indian/Alaskan Native populations who have seen the greatest increases in death rates involving stimulants.

The program also supports California's goal to strengthen the continuum of mental health and substance use disorder services available to Medi-Cal members, and is part of the broader transformation of Medi-Cal to build a more equitable health care delivery system and create better health outcomes for members.

