

## HHS Preferred Terms and Phrases for Consumer Materials, version 1.4

This is a guide. The preferred terms and phrases reflected in this document will not always be the best option in all instances. This guide is designed to help bring consistency to materials written for people who get Texas Medicaid or other state benefits. It should be used along with the documents, "HHS Preferred Terms and Phrases for Consumer Materials" (Spanish), the HHS Style Guide and "HHS Basic Writing Tips for Consumer Materials."

The most recent updates to this list are highlighted in yellow. If you have questions, comments or would like to suggest an addition to this list, please e-mail [hhs.communications@hhsc.state.tx.us](mailto:hhs.communications@hhsc.state.tx.us) with the subject line, "HHS Preferred Terms."

Instead of	Use	Notes and Examples
access	use	
actively participate	be involved	
adolescent	teen or teenager	
alien	immigrant	
alternative	choice	
annual	once a year	
annually	yearly	
applicant	[should usually be avoided]	<b>Example:</b> Instead of "Medicaid applicant," use "person who applied for Medicaid"
appoint	name	
appointment	visit	
approximately	about	
assist	help	

Instead of	Use	Notes and Examples
attempt	try	
available	ready	
category	group	
cavity/cavities	tooth decay	
certified	are approved / will get / are now in	<p><b>Not correct:</b> You are certified for Medicaid on Oct. 1, 2009.</p> <p><b>Correct:</b> You are approved for Medicaid starting Oct. 1, 2009.</p>
check up OR check-up	checkup	Use "checkup" or the Spanish "examen" when referring to a Medicaid medical or dental service which is provided through Texas Health Steps. This is a directive from the federal court stemming from the Frew v. Hawkins lawsuit settlement.
choose	pick	
chronic disease or chronic illness	long-lasting illness	
client	[should usually be avoided]	<p><b>Examples:</b> Instead of "Medicaid client," use "person with Medicaid" or "a person who has Medicaid"</p> <p>Instead of "is your child a CHIP client" use "does your child have CHIP coverage"</p> <p><i>See "Person on Medicaid."</i></p>
communicate	talk	
competent	able	Can also use "has the skills to."
completion	end / finish	

Instead of	Use	Notes and Examples
comply	meet the program rules	
consent	agree to	
contact us	call us (if only a phone number is listed) / e-mail us (if only an e-mail address is listed)	Can also use "send you" if referring to mail correspondence. <b>Example:</b> We will send you a copy of the member directory.
continue	keep getting or keep going	
contraception	birth control	
CPW	Case Management for Children and Pregnant Women	This is a service offered through DSHS.
decrease	reduce / lower	
demonstrate	show	
dependent	[should be avoided]	<b>Not correct:</b> Dependent care costs <b>Correct:</b> Costs for people who depend on you.
denied	not approved / will not get	<b>Not correct:</b> Your Medicaid case has been denied. <b>Correct:</b> You are not approved for Medicaid.
detect	find	
determine	find out / see if / decide	
difficulties	problems / trouble	
discontinue	stop	

Instead of	Use	Notes and Examples
disenroll	leave the program	
disqualified	no longer meets the program rules / can no longer be in the program / not able to get	
educated (v) or be informed	be told	
effective date	start date / the date you can start getting services	
eligible	are able to get	"Eligible" and "eligibility" are both complex, multi-syllabic words. Try to avoid using them by restructuring the sentence.
encourage	urge	
endeavor	try	
enroll	join	
EPSDT or Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment	Texas Health Steps	Texas Health Steps is the federal court-approved name for these Medicaid services for children.
exceeds	is more than	
exhausted (v)	gone through / used up	
facilitate	help / ease	
feasible	can be done	

Instead of	Use	Notes and Examples
fee-for-service Medicaid	traditional Medicaid	<p>Only use the term "traditional Medicaid" when you need to distinguish it from other Medicaid plans such as STAR, PCCM, STAR+PLUS, etc. Otherwise, just use the term "Medicaid."</p> <p>If you have to use "traditional Medicaid," it might be helpful to add the following explanation:</p> <p>You get traditional Medicaid if you are not in the PCCM, STAR, Star Health or STAR+PLUS plans.</p>
for more information	to learn more / Questions? Call 1-xxx-xxx-xxxx....	
frequently	often	
fundamental	basic	
head of household	Contact person	<p>If "head of household" needs to be used, provide a definition.</p> <p><b>For example:</b> If you are applying for children or more than one adult, give facts for the contact person or head of household. The head of household is the main caretaker of the people applying for services.</p> <p><i>See entry "household."</i></p>
household	[should usually be avoided]	<p><b>Not correct:</b> Household composition</p> <p><b>Correct:</b> People living in your home.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>People on your benefits case.</p> <p><i>See entry "head of household."</i></p>
identical	same	
impair	harm	This refers to the use of "impair" as a transitive verb, not a pejorative.

Instead of	Use	Notes and Examples
individual	person	Use "person" unless there's a need to distinguish the person you're referring to from a multiple-person unit.
ineligible	not able to get	
inform	tell	
information	fact	See entry "for more information."
initial	first	
initiate	begin / start	
maintain your health	stay healthy	
make sure to...	[should usually be avoided]	<p><b>Not correct:</b> Make sure to apply for Medicaid.</p> <p><b>Correct:</b> Apply for Medicaid.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Remember to apply for Medicaid.</p>
may	can / might	<p>"May" infers that permission is needed.</p> <p>"Can" lets people know their options.</p> <p>To say what could happen, use "might" instead.</p> <p><b>Not correct:</b> You may call us toll-free at 1-555-555-5555.</p> <p><b>Correct:</b> You can call us toll-free at 1-555-555-5555.</p>
Medicaid ID form	Medicaid ID	
Medical Transportation Program or MTP	medical transportation services	Brand the services, not the program that administers the services.

Instead of	Use	Notes and Examples
notification	notice	
notify	tell	
occur	happen	
opportunity	chance	
option	choice	
permission	agree to / allow	
persons	people	
person on Medicaid	person who has Medicaid	<p><b>Not correct:</b> Texas Health Steps checkups are free as long as your child is on Medicaid.</p> <p><b>Correct:</b> Texas Health Steps checkups are free as long as your child has Medicaid.</p>
pharmacy	drug store	
physician	doctor / clinic / primary care provider	See entry "PCP / medical home"
primary care dentist / dental home	main dentist	
PCP / medical home	primary care provider (first reference) or main doctor	<p>You can use "primary care provider" when other information sent to a consumer specifically refers to choosing or changing a "primary care provider."</p> <p>If you must use "primary care provider," include a sentence similar to the following near the first reference:</p> <p>"A primary care provider is the main doctor, nurse, or clinic that gives you most of your health care." Further references can be to "primary care provider" or "your main doctor."</p>

Instead of	Use	Notes and Examples
private health insurance	other health insurance	
process (v)	to do work on	
provide	give / offer	
prior to	before	
qualified	are able to get	
qualified alien	legal immigrant	
recertify	renew or re-apply	
re-enroll	renew / apply again	
relating to	about	
request	ask for	
required	need or needed	
resolve	fix	
resources	things you own	<p>You might need to give examples of types of resources.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> You must report a change if your resources are more than \$10,000. This includes things like money you have in the bank, stocks, bonds, and cash.</p>
select	pick	

Instead of	Use	Notes and Examples
several	many	
shots	vaccines or vaccinations	<b>Exception:</b> When writing about flu shots in English materials, the word "shot" is ok to use.
stamped, self-addressed return envelope	pre-paid envelope	
suffer	[avoid when writing about an illness]	The word "suffer" can be insulting when talking about some conditions like mental illness.
TDD	TTY	TTY is the newer, more commonly used technology.
telephone	phone	
terminate	end	
third party insurance or third party liability	other insurance	
THSteps	Texas Health Steps	<b>Exception:</b> 1-877-847-8377 (1-877-THSteps)
TP or Type Program	Use the name of the Medicaid program.	
ultimate	last / final	
understand	know	
utilize	use	
vaccinations	vaccines	
verification	proof	
we are writing to tell you...	[should usually be avoided]	

<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Notes and Examples</b>
you are required to you are responsible for	you must	