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GAVIN NEWSOM  
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AFL 19-42

**TO:** All Facilities

**SUBJECT:** Debt Free 2021 Campaign

**All Facilities Letter (AFL) Summary**

- This AFL announces the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), Center for Health Care Quality (CHCQ) Debt Free 2021 Campaign. This campaign is a statewide effort to investigate and close backlogged complaints and facility reported incidents (FRIs) by the end of 2021.
- This AFL shares the strategies that CDPH will use throughout the campaign and how it may impact complainants and health care facilities.

In 2019, the Center for Health Care Quality (CHCQ) in the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) did a full internal assessment on the timeliness and quality of the Center's multiple responsibilities to Californians. During this process, it was clear that one of CHCQ's biggest debts to California was the backlog of health care consumer complaints and the facility reported incidents (FRIs). Therefore, CDPH established a performance improvement workgroup that included representatives from all state-wide offices to immediately create a sustainable action plan to solve this longstanding issue. The workgroup conducted a root cause analysis of how the backlog occurred, evaluated CDPH's current investigation processes, and developed new streamlined and standardized processes to ensure quality and thorough investigations at all locations. While staff will continue to prioritize new complaint and FRI intakes and investigate these incidents based on the severity of the incident reported, they are implementing new strategies to eliminate the backlog.

CDPH refers to this initiative as the Debt Free 2021 Campaign. This campaign is a statewide effort to investigate and close backlogged<sup>1</sup> complaints and FRIs by the end of 2021. CDPH is starting the campaign with a baseline of 22,902 complaints and FRI investigations. As a part of this initiative, CHCQ is adjusting workload priorities to expand its focus on conducting timely and thorough complaint and FRI investigations.

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<sup>1</sup> Backlog is considered older than six months for non long-term care and 60 days for long-term care. This is measured on a rolling basis every month. The number will fluctuate depending on the number of backlogged intakes closed during a month and the number of intakes rolling into the Center each month.



Some of the new strategies include structures to ensure staff consistently prioritize open intakes by triaging them by severity and time. CDPH's backlog reduction strategies also include:

- Using structured processes for all staff throughout the state to use the same forms and standardized processes for high quality, consistent, and thorough investigations
- Using off-site reviews when applicable for some non long-term care complaints/FRIs and some long-term care FRIs
- Batching multiple complaints/FRIs for investigation, including during periodic licensing and/or certification surveys to reduce time in traveling to remote or high traffic locations
- Sending out larger survey teams with team members dedicated specifically to investigating backlogged complaints/FRIs to efficiently schedule the workload and resources throughout the state
- Prioritizing complaints/FRI workload first and creating dedicated teams

Complainants will receive a call from a CDPH representative regarding a backlogged case to obtain additional information. Complainants should anticipate follow-up questions regarding their complaint and provide a list of other witnesses (if applicable) to interview as part of a thorough, high quality investigation.

For FRI investigations, facilities should anticipate requests to have documents and records readily available for surveyors when they arrive, which may include planning ahead to investigate multiple cases during the same visit.

CDPH is also taking new measures to ensure that we address and investigate future complaints and FRIs more timely and efficiently. CHCQ has shifted its workload priorities to focus on state functions, such as complaint and FRI investigations, and is currently creating new processes for scheduling, triaging, organizing workload, and investigating complaints/FRIs more efficiently. Additionally, CDPH CHCQ is investing in developing paperless processes over the next year to better use existing technology resources to enable staff to perform investigations and surveys in a more efficient, uniform manner.

If you have any questions about the Debt Free 2021 Campaign, please contact the CHCQ Performance Improvement Office at [CHCQ\\_PIM@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:CHCQ_PIM@cdph.ca.gov)

Sincerely,

**Original signed by Heidi Steinecker**

Heidi W. Steinecker  
Deputy Director