

Provider training guide for All Plan Letter 25-016: Alternative format selection for members with visual impairments

For Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plan
Medi-Cal Network Providers



In November 2025, The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) issued [All Plan Letter \(APL\) 25-016](#), “Alternative format selection for members with visual impairments.” It provides information about the DHCS’ processes to ensure effective communication with members with visual impairments or other disabilities requiring the provision of written materials in alternative formats, by tracking members’ alternative format selections (AFS).

This guide is designed to help you understand the information in this APL, and apply it to your practice or facility operations, where appropriate.

You can review this document in its entirety or click the links in the table of contents to go directly to the information you need.

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Understanding APL 25-016

Acronyms and terminology

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act	The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.
AFS	Alternative format selections	AFS refers to materials selected by Medi-Cal members with visual impairments or other disabilities that require written materials in alternative formats such as large print or Braille.
APL	All Plan Letter	APLs are the means by which Medi-Cal Managed Care conveys information or interpretation of changes in policy or procedure at the Federal or State levels, and provides instruction to contractors, if applicable on how to implement these changes on an operational basis.
AR	(Member's) authorized representative	An AR is a Medi-Cal member's authorized representative. For example, someone whom the member has authorized to receive a copy of a letter sent to the member.
DHCS	Department of Health Care Services	The DHCS is the department within the California Health and Human Services Agency that finances and administers Medi-Cal, which provides health care services to low-income people.
MCP	Medi-Cal managed care health plan	An MCP is a health plan, such as Blue Shield Promise, for Medi-Cal members.

Understanding APL 25-016

Requirements

Purpose of APL 25-016

- APL 25-016 aims to ensure effective communication with members with visual impairments or other disabilities requiring the provision of written materials in alternative formats, by tracking members' alternative format selections (AFS).
- Managed care plans (MCPs) such as Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plan (Blue Shield Promise) are subject to the standards of Title II of the ADA, including standards for communicating effectively with individuals with disabilities to ensure they benefit equally from government programs.
- MCPs and their subcontractors and network providers will accommodate and track members' AFS and will inform members how they can update their communication preferences with the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS).
- DHCS will share member AFS data with MCPs on an ongoing basis.
- MCPs will share member AFS data with network providers on an ongoing basis.

Understanding APL 25-016

Requirements

What Blue Shield Promise will do

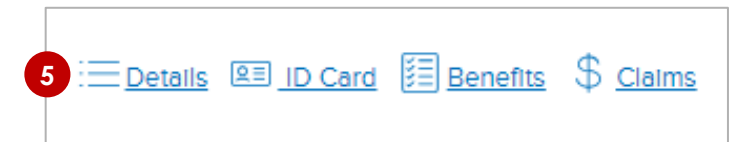
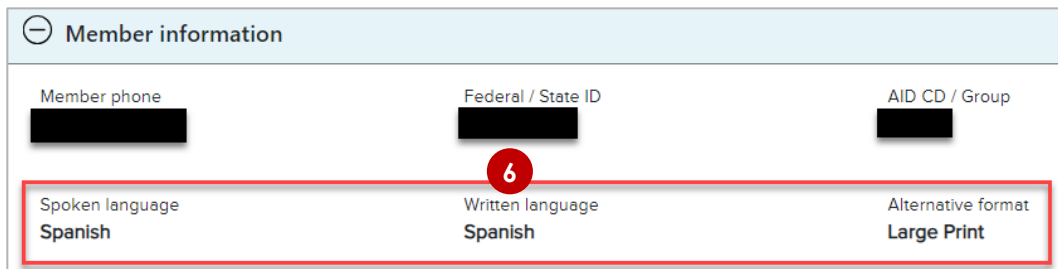
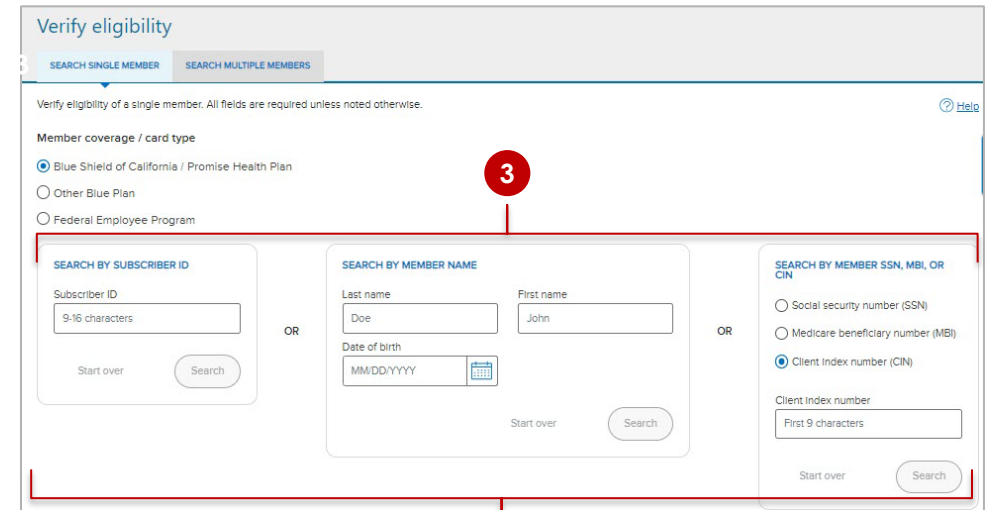
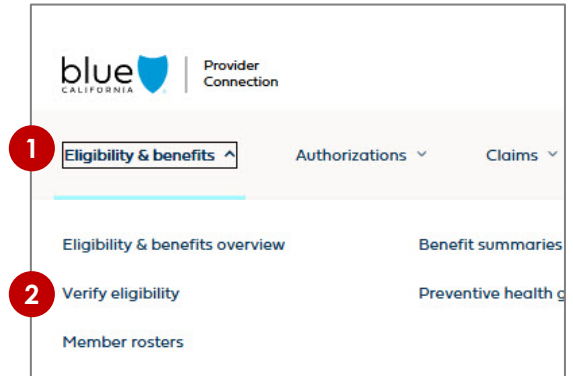
- When requested, Blue Shield Promise will provide members written materials in alternative formats such as Braille, audio format, large print (no less than 20-point, Arial font), accessible electronic format (such as a data CD) and other appropriate aids and services.
 - Alternative formats may be requested for members and their authorized representatives (ARs), which may be a family member, friend, or other associate.
 - Blue Shield Promise utilizes a vendor to create these materials.
- Blue Shield Promise must collect and store AFS information for members and ARs.
- The DHCS maintains member AFS data and sends Blue Shield Promise (and other MCPs) AFS data through the 834 enrollment file.
 - Blue Shield Promise uses this data to update their records.
 - Blue Shield Promise shares this data with providers so that they can update their records with their patients' alternative format preferences. Details about how Blue Shield Promise shares this information with providers is included in the next two pages of this guide.

Understanding APL 25-016

Blue Shield Promise member preferences on Provider Connection

Providers can view Medi-Cal members' written language, spoken language and Alternative Format selections on Provider Connection, Blue Shield's provider website, in the Eligibility & benefits section.

1. After log in, click Eligibility & benefits from the top navigation bar.
2. Click **Verify eligibility** from the list.
3. On the page, enter subscribe ID, members name and date of birth, SSN, Verify eligibility MBI, or CIN to search for a member.
4. Click the active Search button.
5. In the Results section, click **Details**.
6. The Member information section displays. In this example, the member's spoken and written language preferences are Spanish, and their Alternative format selection is large print.



Understanding APL 25-016

Blue Shield Promise member preferences on the Outbound 834 file

Beginning April 2024, Providers, IPAs and MSOs who receive the Outbound 834 file from Blue Shield Promise can view member's written language, spoken language and Alternative Format selections. The Outbound 834 file Companion Guide includes additional information on these changes.

The image below illustrates the file layout for the Outbound 834 with the AFS and language values.

Loop: 2100A Segment: LUI Member Language (SITUATIONAL)					
Identification Code Qualifier	LUI01	R	LD	LD - NISO Z39.53 Language Codes	
Identification Code	LUI02	R	3 digit Alpha Code	3 digit value from the NISO Language Codes	
Use of Language Indicator	LUI04	R	5,6,7	Code indicating the use of a language	5 - Language Reading 6 - Language Writing 7 - Language Speaking

6 & 7: new language indicators – Members choose a writing language and a speaking language

Loop :2750 REPORTING CATEGORY (SITUATIONAL)					
Entity Identifier Code	N101	R		75	
Name	N102	R	ALTERNATIVE FORMAT SELECTION	Member Reporting Category Name	

Loop :2750 REPORTING CATEGORY REFERENCE (SITUATIONAL)					
Reference Identification Qualifier	REF01	R		9V	
Reference Identification		R	No Alternative Format Needed Large Print Braille Audio CD Data CD Encrypted Audio CD Encrypted Data CD Not Selected	Alternative Format Preference description	

New AFS values – Members can choose only one of these options

Understanding APL 25-016

Requirements

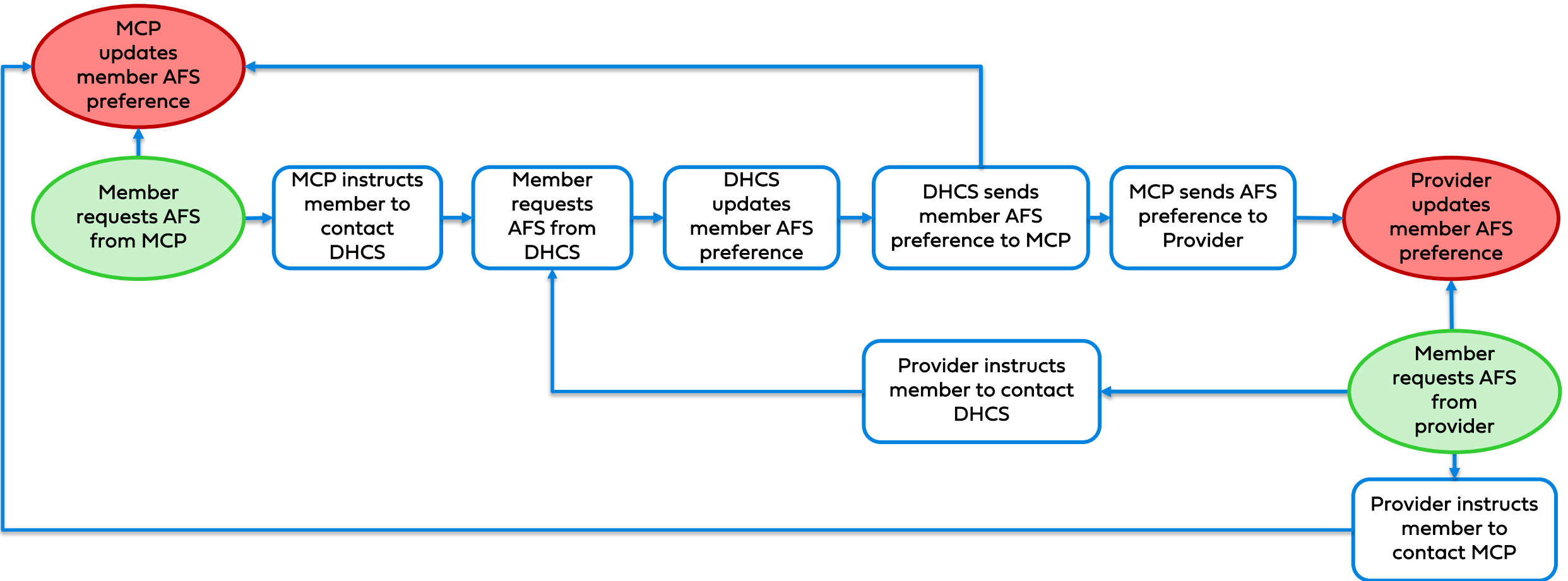
What Providers can expect

- If Blue Shield Promise Medi-Cal members request alternate format materials from providers, providers should:
 - provide the materials as requested by the member in their preferred AFS format.
 - ask the member to contact Blue Shield Promise member services and communicate their preferred format.
 - ask the member to contact DHCS and communicate their preferred format to DHCS: [Alternative Formats](#)
 - Members can contact their local DHCS county office
 - Members can log into (or create) a Covered California account to manage their communication preferences
 - Members can log into (or create) a BenefitsCal account to manage their communication preferences

Understanding APL 25-016

Process

How member AFS preference is captured and updated



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Effective communication requirement of Title II of the ADA

Communication preferences

- People who have vision, hearing, or speech disabilities (“communication disabilities”) use different ways to communicate.
- For example, people who are blind may give and receive information audibly rather than in writing or may read Braille, and people who are deaf may give and receive information through writing or sign language rather than through speech.

ADA requirements

- The ADA requires that title II entities (State and local governments) and title III entities (businesses and nonprofit organizations that serve the public) communicate effectively with people who have communication disabilities. The goal is to ensure that communication with people with these disabilities is equally effective as communication with people without disabilities.
- When deciding what aid or service is needed to communicate effectively, consider the nature, length, complexity, and context of the communication as well as the person’s normal method(s) of communication.
- Click the link below to access a publication designed to help title II and title III entities understand how the rules for effective communication apply to them. <https://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm>

How to provide accessible documents

ADA guidance

- The ADA encourages businesses and nonprofit organizations that serve the public to consult with the person with a disability to discuss what aid or service is appropriate.
- The goal is to provide an aid or service that will be effective, given the nature of what is being communicated and the person's method of communicating.
- Remember, not all ways work for all people with disabilities or even for people with one type of disability.

How to provide accessible documents

Types of alternative formats

Standard alternative format options

- **Large print:** Large (20-point) size Arial font.
- **Audio CD:** Provides the ability to hear notices and information.
 - Files in the CD are not encrypted.
 - Recommended audio format is MP3, the most common format for a digital audio file with a relatively small file size.
- **Data CD:** Allows for the use of computer software to read notices and other written information.
 - Files in the CD are not encrypted and PDF is the recommended file format.
 - Recommended media type is Standard CD-R
- **Braille:** Raised dots read with fingers.

Non-standard alternative format options

- **Encrypted Audio CD:** Provides the ability to hear notices and information.
 - Files per Medi-Cal notice in the CD are protected with a password – passwords must be constructed as specified by the DHCS APL.
- **Encrypted Data CD:** This allows for the use of computer software to read notices and other written information. Files per Medi-Cal notice in the CD are protected with a password – passwords must be constructed as specified by the DHCS APL.

Alternative format vendors

- Blue Shield Promise uses ISI Language Solutions for alternative format and translation services. Their ADA compliance services include Large Print and Braille, Audio CD, Data CD, American Sign Language (ASL), and subtitling services. <https://isilanguagesolutions.com/>
- Blue Shield of California uses Valle Translations. They offer translations from English into Spanish, among several other languages, as well as copy-editing and proofreading services for medical, legal (certified), scientific, technical and literary documents, as well as audio files. <https://www.valletranslations.com/>

How to provide accessible websites

Resources for web accessibility

- Accessibility Online Webinars – The ADA National Network offers free webinars on topics including website accessibility at <http://www.accessibilityonline.org/ao/>.
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) international standard – This site includes documents that explain technical standards for making web content more accessible to people with disabilities. Note that these are technical standards, not an introduction to accessibility.
<https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>
 - To view examples of web accessibility from WCAG, visit <https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/#examples>.

Additional training and resources

Helpful links

- APL 25-016 ALTERNATIVE FORMAT SELECTION FOR MEMBERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS: [APL 25-016](#)
- DHCS Alternative Formats – Member instructions for updating AFS preferences: [Alternative Formats](#)
- Visit the ADA National Network to request ADA Training or view upcoming events at: <https://adata.org/ada-training>
- Pacific ADA Center (California’s regional ADA center): <https://www.adapacific.org/>
- Healthcare information from the Pacific ADA Center: <https://www.adapacific.org/healthcare/>
- ADA Title II Regulations: https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleII_2010/titleII_2010_regulations.htm
- Effective communication requirement of Title II of the ADA: <https://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm>
- Blue Shield Promise Provider Services: (800) 468-9935