In 1981, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services created optional Medicaid waivers that allow states to offer individuals the choice of Medicaid home and community-based services if they are eligible for nursing home or institutional placement. Virginia currently offers eight Medicaid waivers that allow individuals with disabilities to remain in their own community.

Fifteen of the 32 families receiving support on EDCD waivers from the Center for Family Involvement reported that: 1) they were instructed that they first had to apply for traditional Medicaid rather than being referred to a screening team for eligibility for Medicaid long term care services or 2) their child received a screening for the EDCD waiver, but were denied waiver services either because of financial eligibility or because they did not meet the criteria for nursing home placement. In Virginia, preadmission screening is not contingent upon a determination of financial eligibility for Medicaid - in fact, family income is waived for Medicaid waiver eligibility. Moreover, the EDCD waiver screening instrument is not easy to locate on the state Medicaid website and does not include parent-friendly instructions on how to answer the questions.

Through our work with three of the families who spoke English as a second language, staff learned that the families were not provided materials in their native language and/or were not immediately provided a translator. From a review of the state Medicaid website, we found documents exclusively written in English, and did not find information for professionals about federal requirements for providing language translators.

We offer the following actions for consideration to ensure that children and youth with special health care needs and disabilities and their families have access to waiver supports and services. In support of families, we recommend that the Department of Medical Assistance Services:

- Provide training specifically for front-line staff that distinguishes long term care services from traditional Medicaid to ensure that families who are applying for long-term care are not found ineligible for financial reasons.
- Develop and document a clear process, consistently implemented by every screening team, for families to access long term care supports through the EDCD waiver.
- Provide on-going cultural diversity training to all Medicaid waiver screening teams (including information on obtaining interpreters) and provide documents in Spanish (at a minimum) on the state Medicaid website so that families for whom English is a second language have equal access to information about Waivers.
- Provide information on Virginia Medicaid waivers to a wide range of people who directly interface with the public so when a family inquires about these services, they receive culturally sensitive, accurate, and appropriate information, and are directed to the correct screening agency and staff contact.