

'April 1 does not work': N.Y. lawmakers want more time for Medicaid home care change

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Several New York state lawmakers said Tuesday the state will need more time to transition a \$9 billion Medicaid home care program under one company — sounding unsatisfied by state health leaders' responses to their questions about its progress.

Company Public Partnerships LLC has just over seven weeks to register 280,000 New Yorkers who use the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program for home care and their caregivers. As of Monday, about 40,000 consumers and workers have each started or completed their registration, according to the state Health Department.

"They're running ahead of what they said they would run — they're a few thousand people ahead," State Health Department Commissioner Dr. James McDonald said of PPL to reporters Tuesday.

But at its current rate, over 4,100 consumers must be registered per day to meet the mandated April 1 deadline. Still, health officials maintain the transition is ramping up and PPL will meet the deadline.

"It was always anticipated that this transition would advance at the pace we've seen thus far, with engagement and registrations scaling up as the process continues through April 1," a Health Department spokesperson said in a statement. "Our much-needed CDPAP reforms will protect home care users, while also protecting taxpayers across New York by ending years of runaway Medicaid costs."

The health commissioner, who is Assemblyman John McDonald's brother, sparred with several lawmakers about the issue for hours at a budget hearing in Albany. Senate Health Committee chair Gustavo Rivera urged health leaders to extend the deadline.

"April 1 does not work, and I suggest to the [Hochul] administration that they privately talk amongst themselves to see if this is the case," Rivera said. "...You might need to move that deadline because the plan B that you're talking about seems to be just pointing the finger."

More than 600 smaller companies that oversee CDPAP now must stop operations after April 1 when PPL and about 30 subcontractors take over the program.

McDonald and state Medicaid Director Amir Bassiri remained firm that the department would proceed with the current timeline, but would not rule out a delay.

"The Plan B is essentially going to be dependent on where we get to and when," Bassiri said. "The minute we don't meet benchmarks people will know, but in essence, we have confidence there will be no disruption for their members or their workers."

Assembly Health Committee chair Amy Paulin asked health leaders to not delay a request for an extension, which would require the Legislature to amend state law, until the last minute.

"We encourage you to please come to us way before, or before, the April 1 deadline because we here feel pretty convinced that that's not going to be fulfilled," Paulin said.

Gov. Hochul's administration requested the state attorney general or state Commission on Ethics and Lobbying In Government to investigate the group behind a \$10 million ad campaign attacking the CDPAP transition.

Charles Hudson, a CDPAP worker from Syracuse who cares for his mother, is one of a handful of advocates who confronted McDonald after his testimony. Hudson said he had trouble getting answers from PPL about the upcoming change or how to attend events to register in person. McDonald directed him to contact the Health Department about problems getting responses from PPL.

"You should be able to call PPL to get all the answers and information you need, but now if everybody has to go to the Department of Health what does that say about PPL and the transition?" Hudson said.

The commissioner told the home care worker he's confident the April 1 deadline will work. "I heard a lot of feedback today, we'll see where we go," McDonald said. "As we get closer, we'll see what happens."