

April 26, 2019

The Honorable Frank A. Hoffman
Louisiana House of Representatives
204 North 3rd Street
Suite A
West Monroe, LA 71291

Re: American Medical Association support for Louisiana House Bill 526, An act that prohibits the imposition of prior authorization requirements in Medicaid managed care for certain prescription medications used in treating opioid use disorder

Dear Representative Hoffman:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, I am writing in support of Louisiana House Bill (H.B.) 526 that would help put an end to prior authorization for medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder in Louisiana's Medicaid managed care program. Without question, this bill will save lives.

We strongly agree with the Louisiana State Medical Society, Louisiana Society of Addiction Medicine and American Society of Addiction Medicine that this bill will improve access to high-quality, evidence-based treatment for persons suffering from an opioid use disorder.

At a time when the nation's opioid epidemic continues to claim more lives each year, removing barriers to proven treatment such as MAT is essential. An increasing number of states are removing prior authorization for MAT, including North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Arizona, New York, Illinois and Iowa. This is the type of leadership necessary to end Louisiana's—and the nation's—opioid epidemic.

The AMA further supports H.B. 526 because prohibiting prior authorization policies for methadone, buprenorphine or naltrexone will help more patients obtain life-saving treatment. The very manual, time-consuming processes required in these prior authorization policies interrupt care for patients and cause providers (physician practices, pharmacies and hospitals) to divert valuable resources away from direct patient care.

We also note the importance of including all forms of MAT on the formulary. Just as all cancer medication may not work for all types of cancer, not all MAT medications work exactly the same. H.B. 526 wisely ensures that physicians and patients can work together to ensure that they use the right medication to help treat a patient's opioid use disorder.

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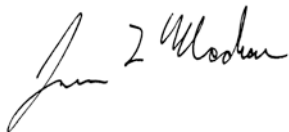
Whether methadone maintenance treatment, buprenorphine, naltrexone or other MAT therapies, the evidence is unequivocal that treatment works.¹ It helps keep people out of jail, in jobs and with their families, but most importantly—it saves lives. That is why national health insurers such as Anthem, Cigna and Aetna announced they will end these policies for MAT;² why Pennsylvania’s seven largest commercial insurers agreed to end prior authorization for MAT—including for Medicaid managed care;³ why North Carolina Blue Cross Blue Shield is ending prior authorization for MAT;⁴ and why the U.S. Surgeon General’s recent “Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General’s Spotlight on Opioids” report calls MAT the “gold standard” of treatment for opioid use disorder.⁵

When a patient seeking care for an opioid use disorder is forced to delay or interrupt ongoing treatment due to a health plan utilization management coverage restriction, such as prior authorization, there often is a negative impact on their care and health. With respect to opioid use disorders, that could mean relapse or death from overdose. There is no reason, either medical or policy, for payers to use prior authorization for MAT, and we urge the Louisiana Legislature to enact this important bill.

While there is much more work to do to fully reverse the nation’s—and Louisiana’s—opioid epidemic, this is an important step in that direction.

Thank you for your leadership on this important public health issue. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center, at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4954.

Sincerely,



James L. Madara, MD

cc: The Louisiana State Medical Society

¹ See, for example, resources from the American Society of Addiction Medicine (<http://www.asam.org/advocacy/toolkits/opioids>) and Prescribers’ Clinical Support System for Medication Assisted Treatment (<http://pcssmat.org/>)

² AMA Commends Aetna Commitment on Opioids Treatment, Feb. 16, 2017. Available at <https://www.ama-assn.org/ama-commends-aetna-commitment-opioids-treatment>

³ See <https://www.media.pa.gov/Pages/Insurance-Details.aspx?newsid=344>

⁴ See <https://blog.bcbsnc.com/2018/11/opioid-epidemic-access-expands-medication-assisted-treatment/>

⁵ See https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/sites/default/files/Spotlight-on-Opioids_09192018.pdf