

May 9, 2019

The Honorable Anthony Portantino
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 2206
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: American Medical Association support for California Senate Bill 11, to remove barriers for evidence-based care for the treatment of opioid use disorder

Dear Senator Portantino:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, I am writing in support of California Senate Bill (S.B.) 11 that would help put an end to health insurer policies of prior authorization for medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder. Without question, this bill will save lives in California.

We strongly agree with the California Medical Association that it is essential to “to ensure that those seeking treatment for substance abuse disorders are able to receive it without long, arduous delays and waiting for health plan approval.”

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. A growing number of states are removing prior authorization for MAT, including Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia. The AMA strongly urges California to continue this national movement to support evidence-based treatment as the key element in reversing the nation’s opioid epidemic.

It is notable that S.B. 11 requires placing MAT medications in each drug class on the lowest cost-sharing tier. Just as all cancer medication may not work for all types of cancer, not all MAT medications work exactly the same. S.B. 11 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. 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

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/>)

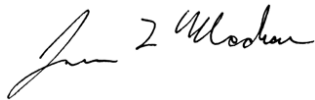
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ended these policies for MAT,² why Pennsylvania's seven largest commercial insurers agreed to end prior authorization for MAT,³ why North Carolina Blue Cross Blue Shield is ending prior authorization for MAT,⁴ and why the U.S. Surgeon General's recent "Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General's Spotlight on Opioids" report calls MAT the "gold standard" of treatment for opioid use disorder.⁵

There is no reason, either medical or policy, for payers to use prior authorization for MAT, and we urge you to sign this important bill to ensure all patients in all health plans do not suffer delays or denials of care when they need it most. Physicians accept that we have a responsibility to prescribe appropriately, use prescription drug monitoring programs, continue to enhance our education, co-prescribe naloxone to our patients at risk of overdose, help reduce stigma and become trained to provide MAT. Through our advocacy efforts and those of the AMA Opioid Task Force, we are committed to doing all that we can to reverse the nation's opioid epidemic.

Thank you for your consideration, and we strongly urge your support of S.B. 11. If the AMA can be of assistance, 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: California Medical Association
Jack Resneck, Jr., MD
Ryan J. Riberia, MD, MPH
Karthik V. Sarma, MS

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

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