



August 8th, 2022



The Honorable Gavin C. Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, First Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Susan Eggman
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee #3
on Health & Human Services
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget
Committee
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Arambula
Chair, Assembly Budget
Subcommittee #1 on Health &
Human Services
Sacramento, CA 95814



RE: Trailer Bill: Mental Health Medication Access Budget Proposal

Dear Governor Newsom, Chairs Skinner, Eggman, Ting, and Arambula:

On behalf of the signatories of this letter, we would like to convey our support of the Trailer Bill proposal, authored by Assemblymember Irwin, which will have little to no fiscal effect and will improve access to crucial medications for Medi-Cal patients with Serious Mental Illnesses (SMI) by removing unnecessary barriers.

This trailer bill, seeks to improve access to crucial medications for Medi-Cal patients who have a SMI by:

- Removing the prior authorization requirement for one year after an initial prescription is approved and allowing automatic approval of prior authorization if the medication was dispensed in the prior year to a person over 18 years of age and is not under the transition jurisdiction of the juvenile court.
- Allowing a 90-day supply of medication for treatment of SMI if the person is over age 18, has met prior authorization, step therapy or fail first requirements, and has filled a 30-day supply of the prescription in the previous 90 days.

- Allowing a pharmacist to dispense an early refill for lost or stolen medication and for an early refill of prescriptions with less than seven days of remaining therapy.

In light of the increased risks SMI patients continue face during the long standing COVID-19 pandemic, this trailer bill is of critical importance. The California Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) recently [reported](#) Medi-Cal was the most common payer for emergency department visits for mental health disorders in 2020. This is not surprising as studies of state Medicaid programs found psychiatric patients' lack of access to these medications contributes to a higher rate of negative outcomes for this population including increased emergency room visits, hospitalizations, homelessness, or incarceration. In addition, these negative outcomes are [further exacerbated](#) across racial and ethnic demographics. In California, 32.4 percent of psychiatric patients reported at least one medication access problem and 57.9 percent experienced an access problem that led to [a negative outcome](#). Under the best of circumstances, our current healthcare system and criminal justice institutions are not properly equipped for these patients let alone during a pandemic. Increasing psychiatric patients' access to these medications has the potential to reduce the strain on our health care and other institutions.

[Florida](#), [Georgia](#), and [Louisiana](#) recently passed legislation that created similar protections by exempting drugs prescribed for the treatment of certain types of SMI, such as bipolar disorders and schizophrenia, from prior authorization requirements if the patient received prior authorization from Medicaid in the previous 12 months. Now is the time for California to take the necessary steps to ensure those with SMI have more immediate access to the medication they need.

It is for these reasons that we are seeking these modest, but very impactful changes to the Medi-Cal system that would significantly benefit beneficiaries with SMI. We respectfully request your support of this trailer bill proposal.

Sincerely,



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Executive Director
California Access Coalition
Chief Executive Officer
California Council of Community Behavioral
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James Gross
Psychiatric Physicians Alliance of
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Jessica Cruz, MPA/HS
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Heidi L. Strunk
President & CEO
Mental Health America of California



Heidi L. Strunk
President & CEO
Mental Health America of California
on behalf of the Connection

CC:

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Tyler Sadwith, DHCS Deputy Director, Behavioral Health
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