



SB 854 - SENATOR JIM BEALL

Mental Health: Access to SUD Treatment

Principal co-authors Senator Wiener, Assemblymembers Aguiar-Curry, Arambula, and Chiu
Co-authors Senators Hill and Glazer, Assemblymember Maienschein and Wicks

Issue

Federal and state laws are in place to ensure Californians struggling with mental illness, including substance use disorders, can receive appropriate treatment when they most need it. But Californians in crisis often face barriers and delays when they seek help for substance use disorders. Medication-assisted treatment, or MAT, is an evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders. Even when a doctor judges that a patient is in need of MAT, patients often go without treatment because of prior authorization and step therapy requirements. SB 854 removes these barriers, allowing a doctor to provide timely and appropriate treatment.

BACKGROUND

Overdose and suicide rates are rising at a terrifying rate. In California alone, there were an estimated 2,012 opioid-related deaths in 2016. The rate of fentanyl-related deaths more than quadrupled between 2011 and 2017, according to the Department of Public Health.

The FDA has approved and indicated 11 prescription-only medications for treatment of three SUDs: opioid use disorder (OUD), alcohol use disorder (AUD), and/or tobacco use disorder (TUD). MAT is the use of these medications in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies for the treatment of substance use disorders. A combination of medication and behavioral therapies is effective in the treatment of substance use disorders, and can help people to sustain recovery.

The Surgeon General's 2016 report, Facing Addiction in America, says MAT "is a highly effective treatment option for individuals with alcohol and opioid use disorders. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated the efficacy of MAT at reducing illicit drug use and overdose deaths, improving retention in treatment, and reducing HIV transmission."

A 2017 California Society of Addiction Medicine (CSAM) survey of its membership showed significant concern about the administrative barriers created by authorization requirements. Fifty-six percent of respondents found it

difficult to access MAT for patients new to treatment due to insurance barriers, and 46 percent had difficulty getting approval for maintenance treatment.

41 percent of physicians experienced situations where patients went without treatment due to authorization delays. Often one to two hours of employee time was required per patient to collect documentation for clinical justifications, drug screens, and counseling, and to call the health plan (which was required more than half the time). When a person struggling with addiction is willing to work with their doctor and try medication- we need to jump at that chance.

THIS BILL

SB 854 prohibits a mental health plan or insurer from imposing any prior authorization requirements or any step therapy requirements before authorizing coverage for FDA-approved prescriptions. It will also place the FDA-approved medications for treatment of substance use disorders on the lowest cost-sharing tier.

SPONSORS

The Kennedy Forum
Steinberg Institute

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Carrie Holmes
Office of Senator Jim Beall
(916) 651-4015
Carrie.Holmes@sen.ca.gov