

May 18, 2019: State Advocacy Update

AMA highlights work done in Mississippi and North Carolina to end the opioid epidemic

Two new reports produced by the AMA and Manatt Health highlight the life-saving strategies that are being used to combat the opioid epidemic in North Carolina (PDF) and Mississippi (PDF), in addition to noting areas where improvements could be made. The reports, which are based on data, include a review of policies and discussions with key policymakers and point to policies that have helped patients with opioid use disorder.

In North Carolina, the state Medicaid program and leading commercial payers have improved treatment opportunities for patients by making medication-assisted treatment (MAT) more available, promoting access to comprehensive pain care and expanding access to the overdose-reversing drug naloxone, while promoting harm reduction services. Similarly, Mississippi has expanded naloxone access and engaged the community with StandUp Mississippi, a program designed to help reduce stigma and promote overdose prevention across multiple state and federal agencies. Mississippi also started a program at the University of Mississippi Medical Center focused on increasing access to opioid alternatives.

To read the reports in full and learn more about what the AMA is doing to combat the opioid epidemic, visit www.end-opioid-epidemic.org.

Judge rules that inmates in Maine are entitled to medication-assisted treatment

Leading national and New England-based medical associations joined together to applaud a federal appeals court ruling that a Maine jail must provide a woman with MAT for her substance use disorder while she serves a 40-day sentence. The ruling from the U.S. Court of Appeals in Boston upheld an earlier ruling from the federal district court in Maine. Over a dozen leading medical associations asked to file an amicus brief in support of the lawsuit.

The appeals court affirmed the lower court ruling without the need for oral argument or further briefing. Medical experts and addiction specialists from those associations hailed the appeals court decision, calling it an incredibly important step in the fight to end the opioid crisis that will reduce pain and suffering and save lives. Citing this momentum, they called on corrections facilities around the nation to begin providing necessary care to people in their custody who have substance use disorders.

Read more here.

Iowa removes barriers to evidence-based treatment of opioid use disorder

National and state physicians are congratulating the Iowa Legislature and Gov. Kim Reynolds for their roles in passing a law that will remove common barriers that keep patients from accessing MAT.

Gov. Reynolds signed the bill, which removes prior authorization under Medicaid fee-for-service and managed care administration for at least one form of MAT: methadone, buprenorphine, naloxone, buprenorphine-naloxone combination products and naltrexone.

“Medication assisted treatment saves lives, and, removing the barriers and delays that prevent and slow access to care for patients in need is a critical step in the fight against the opioid epidemic,” said AMA President-elect Patrice A. Harris, MD, who chairs the AMA Opioid Task Force. “We strongly commend Gov. Reynolds and the Iowa Legislature for their leadership and dedication to confront this challenge. This legislation will increase access to care and save lives; states that have yet to take this step should follow Iowa’s lead.”

“The Iowa Medical Society (IMS) worked hard to get this bill enacted because medical evidence clearly demonstrates how MAT improves recovery, reduces health care costs and most important—saves lives,” said IMS President Marygrace Elson, MD. “No patient should have to face a delay or denial of evidence-based care for opioid use disorder—this bill helps remove those barriers for our most vulnerable patients.”

Iowa joins a growing number of states this year that have increased access to MAT. Other states include Arkansas, Colorado, New York, Virginia and the District of Columbia. Bills are pending in other states, including Louisiana and Vermont.

Learn more about what the AMA is doing to help end the opioid epidemic at www.end-opioid-epidemic.org.

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