

CALL TO ACTION

~a monthly public policy newsletter from the Mental Health Association in Michigan (MHAM)~

Vol. 6, No. 12

June 2009

TWO IMPORTANT ALERTS

PARITY

On June 9, the House Health Policy Committee reported two bills mandating that insurers cover autism spectrum disorder and certain specified treatments for it. The Committee did so with the blessing of the Speaker of the House, Andy Dillon.

We begrudge nothing to individuals and families experiencing autism. They are discriminated against in insurance coverage, and that is intolerable. Such discrimination should end, and we leave the particulars of how to best end it to persons with expertise and experience in that area.

If discrimination against one brain disorder (autism) is going to be curtailed, so too should it be for all brain disorders. This is where Speaker Dillon incomprehensibly deviates from the moral, fiscally wise and humane thing to do. Whereas the autism coverage bills have his blessing, bills for mental health parity (HB 4597-4600) apparently do not. This situation has to be turned around, so that vicious insurance discrimination against persons with mental disorders is stopped in Michigan. (As we've noted previously, last year's federal parity improvement law will leave about two million otherwise privately insured state residents without equal coverage in their policies for mental health. Only a state law – bringing Michigan in line with 42 other states – can remedy that.)

We believe a majority of House Health Policy Committee members want to take up mental health parity bills. We believe those bills would be reported out of Committee and voted through by the full House. But we also believe that the Speaker has never been willing to let this happen.

The *Michigan Partners for Parity* statewide coalition is asking everyone who cares about mental health to write or e-mail Speaker Dillon. We suggest you tell him it's time for the House to take up mental health parity bills, and that you expect (and will accept) nothing less. What else you say in your communication is something you can and should determine for yourself.

Please do this right away. Speaker Dillon's mailing address is: Michigan House of Representatives, State Capitol, Box 30014, Lansing MI 48909-7514. His fax is 517-373-5976, and his e-mail is andydillon@house.mi.gov. (Phone = 517-373-0857)

MEDICATION ACCESS

We have told you before how the Granholm administration wants to undo Public Acts 248 and 250 of 2004, which protect many behavioral health drugs from prior authorization within the Medicaid program. The administration claims this would save what amounts to an inconsequential sum of general fund dollars across the entire state budget (even in this time of economic difficulty).

As the state budget situation continues to deteriorate, the administration is ratcheting up the pressure on legislators to "save" what is projected by the administration as \$6-7 million GF (at a time when the administration wants to use millions of Medicaid stimulus dollars to plug other holes in the budget). No one outside the administration has confidence in their figures; even if correct, the "savings" would be outweighed by the cost of requiring vulnerable citizens to "fail first" on other psychotropic products before possibly getting the one that the consumer and doctor believe best for the situation and circumstances.

Please take a moment to call or drop a note to the offices of any or all of the important legislators listed below. Feel free to include your own State Senator or State Representative as well as any other Michigan legislator. Once again, the points you add to the basic message are best determined by you, but the basic message should be that you don't want to return to the chaotic, dangerous days pre-2004 when Michigan Medicaid could prior authorize any behavioral drug it wanted, with those decisions not based on clinical efficacy or safety but solely on cost.

House Speaker *Andy Dillon*: contact info in "Parity" subsection above

Senate Majority Leader *Mike Bishop*: phone – 517-373-2417; Fax – 517-373-2694;
e-mail – SenMBishop@senate.michigan.gov

Senate Appropriations Chair *Ron Jelinek*: Phone – 517-373-6960; Fax – 517-373-0897;
e-mail – SenRJelinek@senate.michigan.gov

Senate DCH Appropriations Subcommittee Chair *Roger Kahn*: Phone – 517-373-1760; Fax – 517-373-3487; e-mail – SenRKahn@senate.michigan.gov

Senate Health Policy Committee Chair *Tom George*: Phone – 517-373-0793; Fax – 517-373-5607;
e-mail – SenTGeorge@senate.michigan.gov {Note: Senator George was chief sponsor of one of the bills in 2004 offering protection to behavioral health drugs}

House Appropriations Chair *George Cushingberry, Jr.*: Phone – 517-373-2276; Fax – 517-373-7186;
e-mail – georgecushingberry@house.mi.gov

House DCH Appropriations Subcommittee Chair *Gary McDowell*: Phone – 517-373-2629; Fax – 517-373-8429; e-mail – garymcdowell@house.mi.gov

To postal-mail Senators: Michigan Senate, State Capitol, Box 30036, Lansing MI 48909-7536.

To postal-mail Representatives: Michigan House of Representatives, State Capitol, Box 30014, Lansing MI 48909-7514.

We all have budget items near and dear to us. But unlike other budget items, medication access is an area where the powers-that-be would have to undo existing statutory to demean our constituents. Let's not allow that.

We welcome copies of any written communications you make and want to send our way, on either parity or medication access. Time is of the essence here. Please act right way.

Thanks for all your assistance and support!

Call To Action is published monthly by MHAM. The primary mode of distributing the newsletter is electronic mail, but we will postal-mail copies to persons lacking Internet access. If you've come across this issue through a friend or colleague and wish to subscribe (there is no charge), kindly let us know. If at any point you wish to unsubscribe, simply contact our office.

Mental Health Association in Michigan
Mark Reinstein, Ph.D., President & CEO~Linda Hryhorczuk, M.D., Board Chair
30233 Southfield Rd., Ste. 220, Southfield MI 48076 ~ Phone: 248/647-1711 ~ Fax: 248/647-1732
e-mail: info@mha-mi.org ~ web: www.mha-mi.org (Frank Andrae, Webmaster)
A United Way-Supported Agency