

Advocates Decry Veto of Medicaid Addiction Treatment Bill

Gov. Andrew Cuomo this week signed a bill into law that prohibits commercial insurers from requiring prior authorization for medication-assisted treatment drugs for the treatment of substance-use disorders. However, he vetoed legislation that would allow Medicaid beneficiaries the ability to access the MAT drug most beneficial to them without mandated prior authorizations.

Previously, commercial insurance was more restrictive, so the signed bill is a "significant improvement in terms of access and coverage and something that really puts our state ahead of other states," said Allegra Schorr, president of the Coalition of Medication-Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates of New York State.. "But the veto is really disappointing."

Access is now more restrictive for the most vulnerable population, Schorr said, adding that's where the disparity exists. "We want to make sure everybody gets everything."

Amy Dorin, executive director of The Coalition for Behavioral Health, echoed that sentiment: "The Governor has now created a two-tiered system, where New Yorkers who can afford to pay will have greater access, while more vulnerable residents will continue to need to jump through hoops," she said in a statement.

Though New York is facing a sizable Medicaid deficit, COMPA's Schorr said that the state needs to think about health care spending "in a more holistic way."

"There is no question, this is just not where the big cost is," she said of expanded access to medication-assisted treatment drugs for Medicaid beneficiaries. "The big cost is in the people who are not getting this treatment."

They end up overdosing and being admitted to hospitals, she said. And many more end up losing their lives.

Earlier this month, a study by RTI International, a nonprofit research institute headquartered in North Carolina, found that removing prior-authorization requirements for opioid-use-disorder medications would [decrease deaths and overall health care costs](#).

Without the legislation for Medicaid, "an opportunity to reduce overdose deaths has been missed," said John Coppola, executive director of the New York Association of Addiction Services and Professionals, in a statement. He added that, "at a time when New York has a fiscal crisis, the potential to save millions of dollars will be bypassed for expensive and repeated hospitalizations and emergency room visits."

Cuomo said in his veto message that there are no clinical differences among available drugs in the opioid-use disorder class and that enacting the law would not improve access. Rather, he said, it would increase the bottom line for a single manufacturer and cost the state about \$30 million.