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## **Bill to End Fail-First Step Therapy for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Passes Assembly Health Committee**

**(SACRAMENTO, CA)** - Protecting patients and championing access to effective care, **Assemblymember John Harabedian (D-Pasadena)** announced that AB 1970, which would prohibit health care service plans and insurers from requiring step therapy for prescription drugs used to treat serious mental illness (SMI) and substance use disorder (SUD) conditions, has passed the Assembly Committee on Health.

Step therapy is a health insurance practice which requires patients to pursue treatment with lower costs that insurers prefer prior to treatment with the medication the doctor initially prescribed. This fail-first process, in addition to placing strain on behavioral health providers, leads to harmful outcomes for patients such as delayed treatment, medical complications, and increased long-term costs. For unhoused and transient patients, step therapy often leads to an absence of treatment, discontinuity in care, and increases the odds of hospitalization. By eliminating step therapy, AB 1970 contributes to treatment success by ensuring best treatment options, consistency, and trust.

*“When someone is dealing with serious mental illness or substance use disorder, delays in starting the right treatment can have real consequences for stability and recovery. AB 1970 helps reduce those delays by allowing providers to move directly to the treatment most appropriate. It is a practical change that supports continuity of care and helps*

*people stay engaged in treatment when it matters most,” said **Assemblymember John Harabedian (D-Pasadena)**.*

*“The California Behavioral Health Association strongly supports Assemblymember Harabedian’s bill to ban step therapy for behavioral health conditions. This legislation is a critical step towards protecting patients and ensuring timely access to medically appropriate mental health and substance use disorder treatment,” said **Dr. Le Ondra Clark Harvey**, CEO of the California Behavioral Health Association. “In behavioral health, those delays can be dangerous, often leading to relapse, hospitalization, homelessness, or worse.”*

AB 1970 reduces the serious consequences of failing first, effectively protecting patients, reducing health related long-term costs, and mitigating patient disengagement.

*“This bill restores decision making where it belongs: between patients and their providers. Mental health care is health care, and people should not have to get sicker before they can get better,” further commented **Dr Le Ondra Clark Harvey**.*

This bill will be heard next in Assembly Appropriations in May.

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*Assemblymember John Harabedian represents the 41st District composed of the cities of La Cañada Flintridge, Pasadena, Altadena, Sierra Madre, Monrovia, Bradbury, San Dimas, La Verne, Claremont, Upland, Rancho Cucamonga, Oak Hills, Piñon Hills and Phelan.*