



BENSON Health Clinic

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To Whom It May Concern:

Mental health problems are widely prevalent in the United States, but access to treatment remains an ongoing issue. In fact, the number of adults with a mental illness that are not able to receive services has not declined since 2011. It is estimated that over 56% of American adults do not receive the mental health services that they need in order to achieve successful remission of symptoms (Mental Health America, 2019). About 47% of American adults cited Insurance coverage or lack thereof as the biggest reasons they did not receive adequate treatment and care (Mental Health America, 2019).

In 2008, the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) was signed into law in hopes of eliminating some of the financial barriers and inequalities to accessing mental health services. The law prevents group health plans and health insurance companies from placing stricter limitations on mental health and substance use disorder treatment. Oregon is no exception to this law as the Oregon Health Authority performs regular compliance checks to ensure that both fee-for-service (FFS) and coordinated care organization (CCO) delivery systems adhere to this law. The most recent compliance report, issued on 7/12/18, found that all FFS's and CCO's were within regulatory guidelines and that no quantitative limitations, such as a limit to the number of days/services, had been imposed on consumers. Soon, this will no longer be the case.

Starting Feb. 1, 2019 Trillium is limiting the number of mental health visits per person to total no more than 25 visits per year without a prior authorization. This includes therapy, substance use disorder, and mental health provider visits. This blatantly violates the parity law as there are no set limits on the amount of medical visits per year that one can have currently while insured under Trillium (Trillium Community Health Plan, 2018). Not only does it violate this law, it also decreases access to mental health services by increasing workload and time constraints placed on mental health providers/agencies. Additionally, this could also delay and/or decrease services for those covered as mental health agencies will have to rely on the time it takes for the prior authorization to be processed and approved. By placing limits on the amount of mental health visits per year, the company is also increasing the likelihood of annual health care charges in Lane County.

It has long been shown that individuals with little to no access to mental health outpatient services are more likely to be hospitalized at inpatient facilities, costing the states a substantial amount of money for these emergency services (Buesching, Fifer, Henke, Mathias, Potter, et. Al, 2003; Baumgartner, Becker, Pushchner, & Zenter, 2015). However, the opposite was found

when individuals have adequate treatment for mental health issues. The higher the number of mental health visits, the lower the annual health care costs were (Hansen, Martin, Murray, Ramessur, Sharpe, Symeonides, & Walker, 2014; Dezetter, Drapeua, Latimer, Lesage, & Vasiliadis, 2016). Specifically, one study found that for each additional mental health visit, there was an average of 2.7% in mean reduction charges (Walker, 2014). Another study based on epidemiologic and economic data in Canada, showed that for every dollar invested in psychological services, two dollars of savings were accrued (Hansen, Martin, Murray, Ramessur, Sharpe, Symeonides, & Walker, 2014). Oregon is already one of the top 3 worst states in terms of mental health services (access and prevalence) and this new change will only continue to make things worse (Mental Health America, 2017).

Please consider these things when determining whether or not Trillium should remain the sole CCO of Lane County. If passed, these new limits on behavioral health visits will disservice us as a community and as individuals. It is time for us as constituents and health care providers of Lane County to stand up and advocate for our right and the rights of others. As Florence Nightingale once said, "Rather, ten times, die in the surge, heralding the way to a new world, than stand idly on the shore." Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

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