



February 29, 2024

The Honorable Representative Susan R. Donovan
Chair of the House Health and Human Services Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for House Bill 7623 - OHIC Report on Prior Authorization Practices for Medications

Dear Chairwoman Donovan and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island's (MHARI) support for House Bill 7623, which would require the Rhode Island Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner (OHIC) to study and report on health insurers' prior authorization practices for prescription medications. We thank Representative Tanzi for introducing this legislation.

Prior authorization (PA) is one of many cost-control mechanisms used by health insurers. The American Medical Association defines PAs as a practice whereby, "physicians and other health care providers must obtain advance approval from a health plan before a specific service is delivered to the patient to qualify for payment coverage." Prescription medications are also subject to prior authorization. Ultimately, PAs bypass providers' expertise, experience, and knowledge of their patients' histories and conditions. PAs limit or deny patients care, services, and prescription medications.

Prior authorization practices have no place in the treatment of serious mental illness. Atypical antipsychotics are not a "one size fits all" classification. Different attributes and side effect profiles may make a particular medication most appropriate for a patient. Patients who live with serious mental illnesses (SMI) like schizophrenia and bipolar conditions rely on their antipsychotic medications to stay safe and healthy. It can take years for a patient and their provider to determine the safe and effective dose of a drug or combination of drugs. Abruptly stopping an antipsychotic medication carries the risk of serious and potentially life threatening side effects such as: vomiting, nausea, and/or diarrhea; painful brain zaps; difficulty sleeping, restlessness, anxiety, and/or agitation; dizziness; and problems with muscle movement including involuntary muscle contractions, inability to stay still, and/or uncontrollable movements. Adjusting to a new medication also carries risk and side effects. A failed trial of a less expensive drug, for example, may result in a chain-reaction of life events such as deteriorating job performance and/or unemployment, housing issues and possible homelessness, criminal activity, deterioration of family relationships, and even hospitalization. Should a patient have to go through all this just to save insurers money?



Mental Health Association of Rhode Island
An Affiliate of Mental Health America

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If this legislation is passed, OHIC will convene a workgroup to examine insurers' PA practices and produce a report with recommendations to the General Assembly. A deeper understanding of PAs' effects on patient care and outcomes, providers' administrative burdens, and insurers' costs, will help this General Assembly make informed decisions to improve and balance our healthcare system.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie-Marie Pisciotta".

Laurie-Marie Pisciotta
Executive Director
cell: (401) 215-4471
laurie.pisciotta@mhari.org