

March 1, 2024

Members of the Senate Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, we are writing in strong support of SF 3532. It has been almost 20 years since the first federal mental health parity law passed. One of the provisions is for plans to document use of prior authorization for both medical care and mental health care services. Many studies have shown that prior authorization is used much for mental health care than health care. The Kaiser Family Foundation found that 84% of Medicare Advantage enrollees are in plans that apply prior authorization to a mental health service. Some states, due to parity violations, have banned prior authorization for mental health care. Data transparency for prior authorizations should be a part of enforcing mental health parity.

Too often, prior authorization slows down or completely impedes access to care. Outpatient care, such as therapy, is one of the least expensive modes of care. Requiring prior authorization, and the subsequent delays, can lead to someone requiring a higher and more expensive level of care. We have seen some plans require prior authorization for sessions longer than 30 minutes. For people with serious mental illnesses or when in a crisis, 30 minutes is not long enough. The same is true for requiring prior authorization for prevention care such as depression screening. Eliminating prior authorization for medication treatment for substance use disorder when we have an increasing number of people dying from opioids simply makes sense.

When people are retroactively denied coverage for services, it can create fear to reach out for help next time. This is especially significant during our current mental health crisis. Parents cannot afford to hesitate to seek care when their children are experiencing symptoms. Early intervention and prevention are some of the most effective tools we have in improving the lives of people with mental illnesses, and we must do all we can to protect access.

We believe SF 3532 strikes a good balance automating processes, encouraging high quality care, and holding health carriers accountable. Please vote to support this bill and improve access to mental health care for Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

Elliot Butay
Senior Policy Coordinator