



November 18th, 2020

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of the State of New York
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Request for Inclusion of NY A3830, Pharmacists' Ability to Administer Long-Acting Injectables for Substance Use Disorder and Serious Mental Illness within the 2021 New York State Executive Budget

Dear Governor Cuomo:

COVID-19 has exacerbated the already dire addiction and mental health crises. It has also intensified access issues for substance use disorders ("SUD") and serious mental illness ("SMI") treatment. Overdoses are surging as more people are using substances in isolation and in-person help is less available. Disruptions to treatment plans have increased the risk of relapse and overdose among patients. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, suspected drug overdoses nationally rose 18% in March, 29% in April and 42% in May.

Furthermore, projections by Well Being Trust estimate that over 75,000 additional deaths will be attributed to "[deaths of despair](#)" (i.e. deaths from suicide, drug overdoses, and alcohol) due to the pandemic. The combination of fentanyl in the stimulant (meth, cocaine) supply is also contributing to rise in overdose deaths. Sadly, before the pandemic, only 1 in 10 who needed addiction treatment received it¹ and even fewer received evidence-based care. This current landscape illustrates that more than ever, **we need all the tools in the toolbox to treat addiction and mental illness.**

As many treatment providers have moved to telemedicine amidst the pandemic, there is a growing concern regarding the ability for patients to receive their long acting injectable medications ("LAIs") for SUD and SMI. Access to medications and psychosocial support services are important components of care for persons in treatment for SMIs and SUDs. LAIs can provide therapeutic levels of medicine for a month or more. Because of this change in care delivery, we also need to consider alternative settings of care for those patients currently receiving LAIs and for those who may be appropriate to begin LAIs as we move forward.

Given the impact of COVID-19 on our hospitals there is an opportunity to alleviate unnecessary burdens on our healthcare system and workers. **Increasing the use of pharmacists to administer these important medications is a means to help address this burden and increase access to life-saving treatments. There are over 40 states that allow pharmacists to administer other prescribed medications beyond immunizations with varying levels of restrictions.** Allowing pharmacists to administer medication can provide numerous benefits including, but not limited to: increased access to quality care, improved adherence to therapy, and increased access to a knowledgeable provider.

¹ National Study on Drug Use and Health, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2018



There are 3 FDA-approved medications that are highly effective in treating opioid use disorder (OUD)—in fact, these medications are considered the gold standard of care. But the sad truth is this: they are sorely underutilized. Medications for Addiction Treatment (“MAT”) are the most effective tool in treating opioid use disorders.

Meeting patients where they are is a critical element of successful recovery, especially in this unprecedented crisis. Pharmacist administration of MAT can be a crucial part of a patient’s path to recovery and remission. Pharmacist administration can benefit those patients who are receiving necessary psychosocial treatment through telemedicine or have physical, geographical or other challenges that limit their access to their health care provider. Furthermore, while addiction is a chronic disease and there are 22 million Americans in recovery from SUD, we should do everything in our power to prevent relapse and keep New Yorkers healthy.

For those struggling from SMI, non-adherence to prescribed medication is prevalent and has been associated with clinical relapses and hospitalizations. About half of patients diagnosed with schizophrenia do not take their medications as prescribed. It is critically important in this time that patients who are on LAI antipsychotic medication can continue to receive their medication.

In addition to providing an alternate setting to increase access to care, allowing pharmacist administration of medication helps increase medication adherence. In a retrospective data analysis, patients who received their LAI antipsychotic medication in an alternate setting, such as a pharmacy, were **4.16 times more likely to adhere to their prescribed medication** than those who did not use alternative care centers for their medication injections.

New York has recognized the value of pharmacist administration of immunizations. Consumer access to these important preventives has increased. The immunization example is a template upon which New York should build. Of most importance in these times, **allowing pharmacists to administer medications can help keep individuals suffering from SUD or SMI engaged in treatment, continue to access their medications, and help mitigate the burden on our emergency departments.**

We implore New York State to prioritize and include the ability for pharmacists to administer long-acting injectable medications for the care of patients with SUD or SMI, within the executive budget for 2021. Inclusion within the state’s executive budget would signal the state’s support for NY A3830 and would allow for this critical legislation to move forward within the legislature. Thank you for your leadership during this crisis and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Courtney Hunter", is positioned above the printed name.

Courtney Hunter

VP, State Policy, Shatterproof



National and Local Supporting Organizations

Adam Bisaga M.D., Columbia University

Coalition for Behavioral Health

College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists

Community Pharmacy Association of New York State

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Friends of Recovery- New York

Fountain House

Legal Action Center

Mental Health America

Mental Health America- New York State

National Alliance for Mental Illness

National Alliance for Mental Illness- NY State

National Alliance for Mental Illness- NYC

National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations

National Council for Behavioral Health

Pharmacists Society of the State of New York