

Support Expanded Access to Care Services via Community Pharmacies: Written Testimony

The National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) appreciates the opportunity to express support for broad access to convenient quality care for New Yorkers by leveraging local community pharmacies. NACDS urges the State of New York to recognize pharmacists as qualified healthcare professionals, enhance pharmacies' engagement within communities through expanded authority for pharmacists to provide quality patient care services as indicated in Part P of Health Article VII, and to make existing COVID pharmacy authority Executive Orders permanent. Furthermore, NACDS urges the state to stay the course to transition Medicaid managed care prescription drug coverage to Medicaid fee-for-service effective April 1, 2021. We urge the Legislature to continue their exceptional efforts throughout the pandemic, especially in leveraging pharmacies to expand access to COVID testing, vaccinations, and more have been vital to ensuring that New Yorkers receive the care they deserve.

Broaden Pharmacist Authority to Ensure Increased Access for New Yorkers

As one of the most frequently visited and trusted members of a patient's healthcare team, pharmacists are well-positioned to safely and conveniently offer essential patient care services, including pharmacy testing, vaccinations, and chronic care services to communities across New York. Pharmacy-based testing has been a well-established practice for many years and is already occurring throughout the country, offering patients additional healthcare destination options. Additionally, vaccinations reduce the rates of disease, improve overall health and have a societal economic benefit as vaccine-preventable diseases and deaths create an approximately \$9 billion economic burden on the healthcare system in hospital and doctor visits and loss of income each year.

Pharmacists' ability to provide such services have been further underscored during the current global pandemic, as the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recognized pharmacies' ability to expand access to COVID testing and vaccinations by issuing broad authorization for pharmacists to order and administer COVID testing, and order, initiate, and administer FDA-authorized COVID vaccines as well as childhood vaccines to patients ages 3 years and older. Thus, NACDS advocates for pharmacies, given their numerous convenient locations and expanded hours, where patients are also able to access safe, cost-effective pharmacy testing and immunization services from a local and familiar healthcare professional in a timely manner; ultimately resulting in reduced downstream healthcare expenditures.

Pharmacists also are capable of extending the reach of quality care to various communities and populations, including medically underserved and rural areas. Several states have recognized pharmacists' ability to independently initiate and modify therapy for pertinent care services. Broadening the scope of the state's Collaborative Drug Therapy Management law would benefit residents of New York. During this pandemic and beyond, it is essential to provide patients additional healthcare destinations, such as pharmacies, in an effort to maintain their health and well-being. As such, Collaborative Drug Therapy Management agreements should be broadened in New York to allow physicians and pharmacists to collaborate across community settings, enabling far more patients to benefit from enhanced drug management and improved adherence and outcomes.

Maintain Momentum to Carve the Pharmacy Benefit Out of Medicaid Managed Care and Into Medicaid Fee-for-Service

With the current transition prescription drug coverage back to Fee for Service (FFS), New York will join other states have successfully carve prescription drug coverage out of managed care resulting in substantial savings to their Medicaid programs. Currently, those states include Missouri, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wisconsin as well as North Dakota effective in 2020.¹ Additionally, the California Department of Health Care Services (Medi-Cal) is actively working towards a transition effective April 1, 2021.

Community pharmacies appreciate the Legislature's efforts to create savings while increasing transparency and access to pharmacy providers in New York that is critical during the current pandemic as citizens and residents seek access to COVID-19 vaccines. As pointed out by the New York State Department of Health, states can generate more savings by carving prescription drugs out of managed care coverage because of the significant administrative burden, taxes, and fees imposed by managed care plans. For example, several states have carved the pharmacy benefit out of Medicaid managed care and cover prescription drugs under Medicaid fee-for-service, including Missouri, North Dakota, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Additionally, the California Department of Health Care Services (Medi-Cal) is actively working towards a transition effective April 1, 2021.

Community pharmacies urge the state to move prescription drug coverage to fee-for-service, which could help provide patients with greater access to the trusted, highly accessible pharmacy providers who are deeply committed to providing prescription drugs and helping patients take medications as prescribed. For example, while managed care plans tend to limit pharmacy networks, which may ultimately limit patient access, the shift to fee-for-service allows patients increased access to all Medicaid-participating pharmacies.

Conclusion

Pharmacists are key partners during a crisis given their accessibility and integration in communities across the state, doctorate-level clinical training, and their ability to ensure patients have access to the supportive care measures they need. NACDS fully supports the Governor's initiative to eliminate social inequity and strongly emphasizes the need to leverage community pharmacies to help reach all residents of New York throughout the state. Providing clinical healthcare services in most neighborhoods across the country, sometimes as the only healthcare provider within walking or driving distance, pharmacies offer solutions to address unmet needs related to health inequality and social determinants of health. This includes identifying and providing necessary linkages to additional care. To that end, NACDS urges the state of New York to broaden pharmacies' engagement within communities through permanent expanded authority for pharmacists to provide quality patient care services as indicated in Part P of Health Article VII. NACDS also urges the state to stay the course to transition Medicaid managed care prescription drug coverage to Medicaid fee-for-service. We appreciate the tremendous and diligent efforts taken by New York's leadership thus far to address the pandemic and access to care for all New Yorkers. We welcome the continued opportunity to work with state leadership to further expand access to your citizens through increased engagement of pharmacies.

¹ <http://files.kff.org/attachment/How-State-Medicaid-Programs-are-Managing-Prescription-Drug-Costs.pdf> (Access on January 4, 2021.)