

February 13, 2020

Senate Bill 545 - Pharmacists - Administration of Self-Administered Medications and Maintenance Injectable Medications - SUPPORT

Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 45,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations and service providers. NAMI Maryland is dedicated to providing education, support and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

NAMI Maryland strongly supports SB 545, legislation that would permit pharmacists to administer injectable medications to their patients. NAMI Maryland strongly supports reduction of barriers to medication and treatment – especially for individuals with severe mental illness. Here's why:

Medications are a powerful tool in treating mental illness.

- With appropriate treatment, the success rate for mental health disorders is 60-80 percent, exceeding the treatment success rate for heart disease.
- Medication adherence is often key to experiencing recovery. Barriers to getting effective and well-tolerated medications, such as prior authorization, can result in poor outcomes for persons with mental illness.
- Individuals with schizophrenia are now able to receive medications like Aristada in a 2-month dose, including the first dose – without the need for further oral supplements.

Safety and healing should drive mental health care.

- Persons with mental illness frequently have other health conditions and multiple medications. Drug interactions and possible dangerous side effects require appropriate medication choices.
- Due to the nature of serious mental illnesses, many may be unable to navigate an appeals process. Prior authorization may compromise health and mental health care for the most vulnerable.
- Providers with expertise in mental health care are in short supply. Once under the care of a psychiatrist or physician, medication provision should be quick and affordable to access to help keep Marylanders healthy.

Without appropriate medications, persons with mental illness may experience instability—and at a high cost: increased risk of state psychiatric hospital and emergency department stays, homelessness, and, too frequently, incarceration.

Research backs this up.

- When individuals with mental illness were unable to get the proper medication: they are almost four times more likely to experience an emergency room visit, hospitalization, homelessness, incarceration, or suicidal behavior.

For these reasons, NAMI Maryland asks for a favorable report on SB 545.

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