

## **HB 684/ SB 659 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Psychiatric Inpatient Care - Admissions Restrictions (Psychiatric Hospital Admissions Equity Act)**

*FAVORABLE*

Chair and Members of the 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 provides education, support and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

This bill would prohibit the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) from limiting or restricting admission of a Medicaid recipient for inpatient care at a specialty psychiatric hospital unless the restriction is based on medical necessity. There have been barriers placed on Medicaid admissions to specialty psychiatric hospitals in the past to limit admissions based on budgetary impacts. These barriers, while temporarily removed due to an agreement with the federal government, are not in the best interests of our most vulnerable Marylanders. These types of barriers also create additional health and access disparities between the Medicaid and commercially insured populations as these barriers are not in place for commercially insured patients. While economic barriers should never be the motivation for a patient to receive medically necessary care, we are now facing an unprecedented demand for behavioral and mental health care.

Although acute care COVID cases are in the decline, the demand for psychiatric services continues to rise as the ongoing effects of the pandemic continue to take its toll on Marylanders. Because of the substantial disparity in access to in-network mental health care and out-of-pocket costs compared to other types of medical care, NAMI believes it is crucial that state and federal regulators routinely conduct market audits of all commercial health insurers and Medicaid managed care organizations for compliance with federal parity law. These audits would help level the playing field for insurers who are doing the right thing—and ensure that individuals with mental illness can access the care they desperately need.

NAMI also recommends the following steps health insurers and Medicaid managed care organizations should take to improve coverage under federal parity law:

- 1. Increase reimbursement rates and other incentives for psychiatrists and other mental health clinicians**
- 2. Increase reimbursement and reduce barriers for tele-mental health services**
- 3. Expand reimbursement models that integrate health, mental health and substance use disorder care, such as the Collaborative Care Model**
- 4. Recruit and contract with a wider range of providers, including mental health and substance use disorder residential and inpatient facilities and allied mental health workers, such as peer support and family support specialists**