

Psychiatric medications play an important role in recovery for many youth and adults who live with mental health disorders. Finding the most helpful and well-tolerated medications and doses, however, can take multiple trials because effectiveness and side effects vary significantly for every individual.

Finding the right medication is critical because failure to respond to or tolerate a medication may lead to costly and devastating relapses. This is important because a relapse can result in problems at school, work, or home—or even hospitalization, criminal justice involvement, or suicide.

## Types of Psychiatric Medications

Several different classes of medications are used to treat a wide range of mental illnesses. Collectively, all of the classes of medications used to treat mental illness are referred to by several terms that may be used interchangeably: psychotropic, psychiatric, psychotherapeutic, central nervous system medications, and more.

<b>Common Conditions</b>	<b>Commonly Prescribed Medications</b>
ADHD	Stimulant and non-stimulant medications
Anxiety disorders	Anti-anxiety medications
Bipolar Disorder	Mood stabilizers and anticonvulsants
Major Depression	Antidepressants
Schizophrenia	Antipsychotics

*(Note: Some individuals receive more than one class of medication to treat their illness)*

Psychiatric medications—even those within the same “class”—often have biochemical differences that result in important differences in drug interactions and side effects. Individuals have unique responses to these medications and a medication that works for one may not work for another.

- According to the National Institute of Mental Health, **individuals have unique responses to psychiatric medications and need more, not fewer, choices.**<sup>i</sup>
- The Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured **recommends exemptions from restrictions for all psychotherapeutic and anticonvulsive medications.**<sup>ii</sup>

## The Impact of Restricted Access

**Restricting access to psychotropic medications may have serious unintended consequences** to both individual health and overall healthcare costs.

- In a study of dual eligible Medicare Part D recipients with mental illness, over half had problems accessing needed medications. The consequences were disturbing: **more than one in five patients (21.7%) reported an increase in suicidal thoughts or behaviors, nearly one in five (19.8%) required an emergency room visit and over one in ten (11%) required hospitalization.**<sup>iii</sup>
- In a study of Maine’s prior authorization of atypical antipsychotics, **persons affected by prior authorization requirements experienced a 29 percent greater risk of treatment discontinuity than persons not subject to these policies.** These medication gaps and discontinuations are strong predictors of negative outcomes, like hospitalization and acute psychotic episodes.
- The Maine study researchers concluded that **“increases in treatment discontinuities without cost savings suggest that atypical antipsychotics should be exempt from prior authorization for patients with severe mental illnesses.”**

*“A medication that works well for one person with schizophrenia often doesn’t work well for another. Genetic variations are thought to play a key role in this difference in response. While patients search for the right medications, their illnesses may worsen.”* **The National Institute of Mental Health, Jan 2008**<sup>iv</sup>

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- <sup>i</sup> National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, *NIMH Perspective on Antipsychotic Reimbursement: Using Results From The CATIE Cost Effectiveness Study*, December 2006.
  - <sup>ii</sup> Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, “Model Prescription Drug Prior Authorization Process for State Medicaid Programs,” April 2003.
  - <sup>iii</sup> West, Joyce C., Ph.D., M.P.P., et al, “Medication Access and Continuity: The Experiences of Dual-Eligible Psychiatric Patients During the First 4 Months of the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit,” *Am J Psychiatry*; 164:789-796, May 2007.
  - <sup>iv</sup> National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, Ethnicity Predicts How Gene Variations Affect Response to Schizophrenia Medications,” *Science Update*, January 2, 2008.