

Representatives Cardin & Ramstad Introduce Legislation to Ensure Coverage of Benzodiazepines

NAMI urges support for legislation to ensure that the upcoming Medicare drug benefit offers coverage for medications commonly prescribed to treat anxiety disorders and acute mania in bipolar disorder.

The Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) that created the upcoming Medicare drug benefit includes a provision creating a class of medications that must be excluded from Part D coverage. Included in this exclusion are benzodiazepines that are commonly prescribed to treat acute mania in bipolar disorder and anxiety disorders. In NAMI's view, it was unfortunate that this inequitable exclusion was ever included in the law. In fact, the exclusion was based on a reference to an optional coverage exclusion added to the state-federal Medicaid program in 1990. NAMI is still working with officials at CMS to narrow the scope of this exclusion to make coverage available for clinically appropriate uses of benzodiazepines.

In addition, NAMI is also working with Representatives Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Jim Ramstad (R-MN) to support legislation (HR 3151) to amend the MMA to remove benzodiazepines from the excluded category of drugs in the Medicare drug benefit (Part D). Attached is NAMI's letter of support for this important legislation. Advocates are strongly encouraged to contact House members to urge them to cosponsor this important legislation.

States Will Be Able to Cover Benzodiazepines for Dual Eligibles

In guidance sent to state Medicaid agencies on June 3, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) clarified that states will be able to receive federal Medicaid matching funds if they elect to supplement the Medicare drug benefit and cover benzodiazepines. This will help ensure that persons concurrently eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid (so-called dual eligibles) will be able to get coverage of benzodiazepines. A copy of this CMS guidance can be found at:
<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/states/letters/smd060305.pdf>

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