

Snapshot on Medication Access

Medications for People With Depressive, Bipolar, and Anxiety Disorders Should Be Exempt From Restrictive Public Policies

- Depressive, bipolar, and anxiety disorders are severe illnesses affecting millions of people.
- Medications are a cornerstone of treatment for these illnesses, helping individuals live and work in the community.
- **Medications that treat these disorders cannot be used interchangeably.**
- Biologic differences among patients mean medications that treat these disorders work differently for each person.
- Access to these medications means that patients can receive timely, safe, and effective prescription drugs with fewer side effects.
- Restricting medication choices will not result in real cost savings.

The Bottom Line—Access to Medications Saves Money and Lives

Depressive, bipolar, and anxiety disorders are 3 of the leading disabilities in the U.S.

- **Access** to medications for people with these disorders is essential for achieving the quickest and the best possible clinical outcome, thus leading to the most cost-effective policy for policymakers and states.
- **Access** to medications for these disorders ensures effective and faster treatment, thereby returning people to work earlier.
- **Access** to medications can save lives—depression is a leading cause of suicide in the U.S.
- **Access** to antidepressant, anti-anxiety, and anticonvulsant medications can mean the difference between hope and despair, recovery and struggle, even life and death for people with these disorders.

State policymakers should preserve and/or restore state funding for medications for people living with these illnesses.

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Facts on Access to Medications for People With Depressive, Bipolar, and Anxiety Disorders:

The Policymaker's Resource



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Depressive, Bipolar, and Anxiety Disorders Are Treatable

- **Approximately 40 million people are living with these illnesses each year.**¹
- The leading cause of disability in the U.S. is mental illness—3 of the 10 leading causes of disabilities are major depression, bipolar disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Lack of treatment is the primary reason for the high prevalence of disability.
- Between 70% and 80% of those living with depressive, bipolar, and anxiety disorders can be effectively treated and return to their normal daily activities and lives. (Figure 1)

Figure 1.

TREATMENT SUCCESS RATES	
Disorder	Treatment Success Rate
<i>Panic Disorder</i>	80%
<i>Bipolar Disorder</i>	80%
<i>Major Depression</i>	70%
Schizophrenia	60%
<i>Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder</i>	60%
Cardiovascular Care	52%
Angioplasty	41%
<i>Source:</i> NIMH 2001.	

The Physical Health–Mental Health Connection

- Research demonstrates that mental health is key to overall physical health. Mental illnesses frequently coexist with other medical disorders.²
- A number of studies have shown that adults with common medical disorders have high rates of depression and anxiety.³ Depression is common in people with coronary heart disease and other cardiac illnesses. This situation is especially dangerous because depression increases the risk of dying from heart disease by as much as threefold.⁴
- People with both diabetes and depression have a greater likelihood of experiencing a greater number of diabetes complications, compared with those without depression.⁵
- By providing access to medications, the evidence suggests improved treatments and outcomes of the physical problems of those suffering from mental illness, and vice versa.⁶

Scientific Breakthroughs for People With Depressive, Bipolar, and Anxiety Disorders—The Evidence Base for Newer Medications

- The newer class of medications for treating depressive, bipolar, and anxiety disorders has been hailed as a major breakthrough by the National Institutes of Health.⁷
- Newer medications also have both fewer side effects and less severe side effects, making it easier for people with these illnesses to adhere to their medications and become more productive.⁸

One Size Does Not Fit All—Medications Are Noninterchangeable

- **“Noninterchangeability” means each drug within the given classes of medications that treat these disorders is unique, and cannot be therapeutically substituted for another medication.**
- No single antidepressant, antianxiety, or anticonvulsant medication works for all patients, all forms of depression, bipolar and anxiety disorders, all situations, or is superior in effectiveness to all other medications within or between classes.
- Because the medications vary greatly, corresponding public policies must provide room for flexibility.

A Fundamental Medical Truth—The Patient’s Individuality

- **Each person reacts differently to particular medications. A specific medication that may help one individual may not help another with the same diagnosis.**
- Proper medications and dosages are determined by a variety of factors, including age, gender, past medication history, and overall health status.
- Getting the treatment right the first few episodes is critically important, as it may reduce the severity of illness over time and costs to the state.
- Limiting access to necessary medications by not taking into account individual patient characteristics can have devastating, even deadly consequences for people with these disorders.
- In the U.S., suicide claims approximately 30,000 lives each year.⁹ The majority of people who die by suicide have a mental illness—often undiagnosed and untreated.
- With recent FDA warnings about the increased risk of suicide when starting on antidepressant therapy for children, it is more important now to allow physicians the flexibility of selecting a medication that will increase the likelihood of a quick, positive outcome.
- Restrictive cost-containment measures such as fail-first policies will end up trading risk for cost.

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Risky Business—Restrictive Formularies Are Bad Economics for States

- Because of the characteristics of depressive, bipolar, and anxiety disorders, and the uniqueness of the medications used to treat these illnesses, restrictive formularies are not likely to control the costs as effectively as with other chronic illnesses.
- It is critically important to maintain physician and patient choice in order to quickly find an effective treatment, thus achieving the best possible clinical outcome and avoiding potentially higher health care costs such as emergency department visits, hospital stays, and crisis management. Finding effective treatments early avoids additional budget costs related to increased homelessness and involvement with criminal justice systems.¹⁰⁻¹⁴
- Limiting access to necessary medications also impacts negatively on productivity and the economy. With appropriate treatment, many people with mental illnesses are able to work and contribute as tax-paying members of society. The denial of appropriate treatment impairs the ability of people with these disorders to maintain employment and fosters dependency on publicly funded benefits such as Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid.

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Positive Effects of Access to Medications Are Enormous

- **Enhanced productivity**—With appropriate treatment, most people with these disorders are capable of working and contributing to the American tax base. A recent survey found that the majority of the costs of treating depression were offset by the increased productivity of the individuals who received treatment.¹⁵
- **Decreased public expenditures for hospital-based services**—The provision of appropriate treatment for these disorders decreases the necessity of crisis-oriented psychiatric services in inpatient treatment settings, the costs of which are frequently financed by publicly funded programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, or state mental health funds.
- **Lower burdens on law enforcement, courts, and correctional facilities**—Police have become front-line responders to people experiencing psychiatric crises in the U.S. Correctional facilities have become the largest de facto psychiatric treatment facilities.¹⁶ The availability of timely and appropriate treatment for people with mental disorders will lessen significantly the considerable financial and human resource burdens that these roles entail.
- **Healthier and more productive families**—The availability of appropriate medications for people with these disorders decreases burdens on family members to provide constant care, and thereby allows family members to work and contribute more meaningfully to society.

Availability of appropriate treatment decreases burdens on family members to provide constant care.