



For Affordable Health Care.

For Immediate Release
September 10, 2020

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In Case You Missed It

San Francisco Chronicle Opinion: Gov. Newsom should veto flawed attempt to expand mental health coverage

Senate Bill 855 will hurt patients by disrupting physicians' ability to determine what is best for patients; opens the door for unlicensed mental health providers to treat patients

September 10, 2020 – Today [The San Francisco Chronicle published an opinion editorial](#) authored by Charles Bacchi, President & CEO of the California Association of Health Plans (CAHP). In the op-ed, Bacchi urges Governor Gavin Newsom to veto Senate Bill 855 (Wiener), advocating instead for policy solutions that address the mental health care crisis head on, like alleviating workforce shortages in fields treating mental health and substance use disorder.

Despite the added costs the bill will have on patient premiums, as well as strong opposition from CAHP and the California Department of Managed Health Care, SB 855 recently passed the State Legislature and is now on the Governor's desk for consideration. Though SB 855 intends to address mental health parity, Bacchi argues it will not provide the expanded access to the clinically meaningful mental health and substance use disorder care it claims, and will impact coverage for only 0.2% of enrollees.

Excerpts [from the article](#) are below:

San Francisco Chronicle: Opinion: Gov. Newsom should veto flawed attempt to expand mental health coverage

"...California's health plans already provide comprehensive coverage for mental health and substance use disorders and continually work to ensure patients receive care that is on par with medical and surgical treatment in compliance with well-established state and federal mental health parity laws. Yet SB855 deletes the historic state parity law championed in 1999 by Assemblymember Helen Thomson and Sen. Don Perata...

"...The bill writes into California law a narrow definition of medical necessity that will disrupt the ability of physicians and therapists to determine what is clinically appropriate for their patients. The bill also opens the door for unlicensed mental health providers and facilities to treat those suffering from mental health and substance use disorders, which may put many vulnerable patients at risk..."

"...The future of mental health care in our state demands a more thoughtful solution than what is contained in SB855. According to a recent report, California will have 50% fewer psychiatrists

and 28% fewer psychologists, marriage and family therapists, licensed counselors, and social workers by 2028. In 2019, Gov. Gavin Newsom and the Legislature invested \$110 million in mental health workforce development. Health plans and providers alike are also investing hundreds of millions of dollars in a wide variety of initiatives to improve access to care. In addition, 2020 began with Newsom establishing a Behavioral Health Task Force to implement needed reforms to our state's mental health system..."

The full opinion editorial by Charles Bacchi in *The San Francisco Chronicle* can be read [here](#).

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the [California Association of Health Plans](#).

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