



POLICY STATEMENT

LGBTQ+ individuals in Colorado are at greater risk of mental health concerns than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts and often experience disparities in accessing services for their mental health as well. Senate Bill 23-033 would allow increased access to mental health prescription medications for LGBTQ+ that they may not otherwise receive. Additionally, this bill will help decrease the likeliness that LGBTQ+ individuals may become incarcerated or hospitalized. Envision:You strongly supports SB23-033.

SB23-033: Medicaid Preauthorization Exemption

Colorado Senate Bill 23-033 would prohibit preauthorization, step therapy, and fail first requirements for medicaid coverage of prescription drugs for Colorado residents with serious mental health disorders. There are around a quarter-million Coloradans who live with a serious mental illness, yet less than half of the adult population living with a serious mental illness receive the appropriate care. This bill constitutes serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, schizo-affective disorders, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder. The bill highlights that these mental health concerns will be addressed with this legislation because individuals with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder are more vulnerable without access to appropriate treatment. Individuals with schizophrenia who experience barriers to care are more susceptible to hospitalization, which includes a twenty-three percent higher inpatient cost. Individuals with bipolar disorder who experience barriers to care are more susceptible to incarceration as a result of increased stigma and inadequate treatment. The bill lastly addresses that reducing restrictions to care can lead to better outcomes for those with serious mental illnesses while restrictive policies can cause significant human, economic, and social costs.

Why it Matters

Addressing the systemic and personal impacts of living with serious mental illness is an important issue for the state of Colorado. As mentioned, there is about a quarter-million of the

state's population living with a serious mental illness and most do not receive the appropriate treatment. This not only impacts the individual negatively, with a greater risk of hospitalization or incarceration, but also the state. Healthcare and criminal justice system costs could be reduced if individuals with serious mental illness were given access to necessary treatment before their symptoms or condition escalate to a crisis. It is also important to note, which is not specified in the legislation, that serious mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and major depressive disorder, have some of the highest rates of suicidality of mental health concerns. Therefore, this legislation will also help prevent death rates due to suicide among Coloradans with serious mental health concerns.

As mentioned in this legislation, serious mental illness affects many Coloradans and often these individuals are left vulnerable without access to appropriate mental health services. LGBTQ+ Coloradans are one of the most vulnerable demographics to this concern. While there has been little research on how LGBTQ+ individuals are impacted by serious mental illness and access to treatment, studies show that this issue is one of great importance for the community. The LGBTQ+ community is at increased risk of behavioral health concerns and is most likely to not receive treatment. Due to generalized barriers, such as lack of access to healthcare and discrimination in healthcare settings, LGBTQ+ individuals are already more likely than their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts to go without treatment. This is compounded further with the barriers individuals with serious mental illness face, such as discrimination and stigma. The passing of SB23-033 would create greater access to the necessary treatment and care that some of Colorado's most marginalized are in need of. Barriers to treatment can be detrimental to the individual. Therefore, reducing current barriers will aid in promoting healthier residents of Colorado and help the state socially and economically.

Senate Bill 23-033 will allow those with serious mental illnesses to receive the healthcare treatment they need without treatment barriers to navigate and potentially deter treatment altogether. This legislation will increase Coloradans access to care allowing these individuals, especially some of the most marginalized, better outcomes in their treatment and save the state money on criminal justice and healthcare costs. Envision:You strongly supports SB23-033.

Envision:You

Envision:You seeks to close gaps in behavioral health outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals through co-created community programming, advocacy engagement, public awareness campaigns, and evidence-based training. To learn more please visit: www.envision-you.org.

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