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Special COVID-19 Letter of Direction #9-1

Date: March 16, 2021 (effective March 11, 2020)

To: Centennial Care 2.0 Managed Care Organizations

From: Nicole Comeaux, Director, Medical Assistance Division
Neal Bowen, Director, Behavioral Health Services Division 

Subject: COVID-19 Special Requirements for Prior Authorization and Cost-Sharing Repeal and Replace COVID-19 LOD #9

Title: Special Requirements for Prior Authorization and Cost-Sharing

The purpose of this Letter of Direction (LOD) is to provide guidance and directives to the Centennial Care 2.0 Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) for modification of services and program standards related to the national public health emergency associated with the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The purpose of these changes is to assure the continuation of essential services to Medicaid patients without disruption or delay while following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) direction to maximize social distancing for the duration of the public health emergency.

This Special COVID-19 LOD replaces and provides clarification to LOD #9 for prior authorization requirements for ABA services during the COVID-19 emergency:

- 1. Prior Authorizations for COVID-19 Testing and Treatment** – HSD directs the MCOs to waive all prior authorizations for members to obtain COVID-19 testing and treatment services (including inpatient and outpatient), and to alert providers of this provision. This requirement is for COVID-19 related services only. If a service that currently requires prior authorization is rendered as a COVID-19 related service, it will not be necessary to obtain a prior authorization.
- 2. Prior Authorizations for All Other Services-**
 - a. **Existing Non-COVID-19 Related Prior Authorizations** - MCOs are directed to extend all existing prior authorizations for the duration of the public health emergency.

- b. **Long-term care services-** For direction on long-term care services, please see COVID-19 LOD #6; and
 - c. **New Prior Authorizations for Non-COVID-19 related services** (for example: braces)- Prior authorization will be required as usual.
- 3. **Access to Authorization of Services-** The MCOs are required to maintain 24-hour/7-day per week access to individuals with the authority to authorize services. HSD must have contact information for these individuals.
- 4. **Emergency Care-** Consistent with current Medicaid regulations, coverage of all medically necessary emergency care is required without prior authorization, whether such care is provided by an in-network or out-of-network provider.
- 5. **Prohibition Against Cost-Sharing for Testing or Treatment** – Consistent with current Medicaid regulations, members are exempt from all cost-sharing, including for COVID-19 screening, testing and treatment services. Members may not be held liable for unlawful balance bills from providers for these or other services provided to Medicaid members.
- 6. **Prior Authorizations for ABA services-** Prior authorizations for ABA services extended due to the public health order should be extended without requiring providers to submit a new prior authorization (PA) request. This includes adding units to the extended PA with the same number of units from the PA that was in place. Providers would only need to submit a new prior authorization request if the need for additional units exceeds what was extended.
 - a. Example: An approved 6-month PA with 10 units would be extended with another 10 units for an additional 6 months. The intention is to extend and include these units so that recipients would be able to continue to access the needed services with no disruption during the public health emergency.

HSD values its continued collaboration and partnership with the MCOs to implement these directives as quickly as possible to help assure the health and safety of Medicaid members and our fellow New Mexicans. Further direction will be provided as guidance and authorities become available.

The effective date of this LOD is retroactive to the date of New Mexico’s emergency declaration on March 11, 2020. This COVID-19 LOD will sunset when the Human Services Department determines that the national public health emergency associated with the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has been contained.