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Illinois awarded \$4.5 million in federal funding to improve Medicaid substance use disorder treatment

State is one of 15 receiving funds for enhancing behavioral health care

Springfield, Illinois –Illinois will receive a \$4.5 million grant from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to examine and improve substance use disorder treatment strategies for Medicaid members, the state’s Department of Healthcare and Family Services announced today.

Illinois is one of fifteen states to receive funding, which will launch an 18-month assessment with stakeholders to ultimately better respond to the behavioral health needs of Medicaid members, including for substance use disorder (SUD) treatment and recovery support.

“Like most states, Illinois has experienced a dramatic increase in drug overdose deaths that can primarily be attributed to the misuse of opioids,” said HFS Director Theresa Eagleson. “We know that one of the most effective tools to combat this crisis is medication-assisted treatment, often in combination with counseling. Understanding the gaps in access to these services is critical so that we can build treatment capacity where it is most needed.”

Working with stakeholders, a needs assessment will be developed, leading to the creation of effective strategies for building more infrastructure and capacity and reducing gaps in Medicaid-covered SUD treatment and recovery services. Following the 18-month planning phase, Illinois will be eligible for a 36-month implementation grant, which would support increased access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and other critical recovery supports for Medicaid beneficiaries in Illinois.

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SUD Grant/AD-1

The grant comes out of the Substance Use Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities (SUPPORT) Act. It is overseen by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, part of the US Department of Health and Human Services.

HFS will work closely with Cook County Health, Southern Illinois Healthcare and the University of Illinois Office of Medicaid Innovation (OMI) in providing training and technical assistance to providers in order to increase statewide access to high quality, evidence-based SUD treatment. Maria Bruni Ph.D. of HFS led the effort to secure the grant and will oversee its operations.

“It is critical for the state to understand barriers, such as staffing shortages, that substance use disorder treatment providers face when trying to increase the number of patients they serve,” said Medicaid Director Doug Elwell. “These additional resources will help develop the behavioral health workforce so that Medicaid beneficiaries have access to evidence-based services with a track record of proven effectiveness.”

Improving behavioral health care is a high priority of the Medicaid program, since Medicaid members with substance use and mental health disorders make up 25% of the Illinois Medicaid population, but account for 56% of the total Medicaid spend.

The Illinois behavioral health ecosystem is heavily reliant on institutional care rather than community-based care. Approximately 40% of Illinois Medicaid behavioral health spending is dedicated to inpatient or residential care.

This over-reliance on institutional care has significant implications for behavioral health members, who may experience additional stress due to removal from their communities and treatment in more restrictive institutional settings. One goal of the grant project will be to examine effective community-based care approaches.

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