

FACT SHEET

SB 946 (Steinberg)

Autism & Behavioral Health Treatment

Purpose of the Bill

SB 946, authored by Senator Steinberg— President Pro Tempore, requires that private health plans and insurance companies must provide coverage of behavioral health treatment (BHT) for individuals with autism or pervasive developmental disorders. BHT is now recognized as the single most effective form of healthcare therapy for these disorders. The intent of this legislation is to ensure access to quality behavioral health treatment for individuals with autism and pervasive developmental disorders.

The Problem & Need for the Bill

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the fastest-growing serious developmental disability in the U.S. ASD is now more common than childhood cancer, juvenile diabetes and pediatric AIDS combined. Although there is no cure for ASD, behavioral health treatment (BHT) is now widely accepted as an effective medical treatment for this disorder (i.e. American Academy of Pediatrics; National Institutes of Mental Health; U.S. Surgeon General; medical/scientific literature). Nevertheless, many private health plans and health insurance companies deny BHT under the pretext that it is an educational service and therefore not a covered benefit. This administrative decision by the health plans precludes any review by physicians or other medical providers; thereby potentially withholding crucial medical services.

What Will This Bill Do?

SB 946 establishes a definition and criteria for BHT that are consistent with established medical treatment standards. This bill simply requires coverage for BHT services that meet these standards. This legislation also establishes appropriate guidelines and standards for individuals, groups, and entities that will be designated as appropriate providers for these services. In addition, the Department of Managed Health Care will convene an Autism Advisory Task Force that will provide technical assistance on specified issues related to BHT for autism and pervasive developmental disorders. This legislation does not alter the current grievance or appeals process nor does it affect case management or utilization review. Furthermore, questions of medical necessity, experimental interventions, and other treatment issues will be resolved by the existing “Independent Medical Review” process that is regulated by the Dept. of Managed Health Care or the California Dept. of Insurance. SB 946 is a step in the right direction to ensure that the health plans are doing their fair share in the treatment of this disorder

Sponsors: Alliance of California Autism Organizations; Autism Speaks; Special Needs Network; The Help Group

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