



September 17, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, First Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 365 (Caballero) E-consult service – REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Chairwoman Gonzalez,

On behalf of the California State Association of Psychiatrists (CSAP), I respectfully request your signature on SB 365 (Caballero), requiring Medi-Cal to reimburse all participating primary care providers, including those who operate out of a federally qualified health center (FQHC) or rural health clinic (RHC) for e-consult services.

Current California Department of Health Care Services telehealth policy only allows for the reimbursement of e-consults delivered by consultant providers, usually specialists. Reimbursement does not exist for requesting or treating providers, who are usually the primary care providers. Existing law also prohibits FQHCs or RHCs from being compensated for the e-consults that their requesting providers render. In areas with limited access to care, such as rural areas, e-consults offer a much-needed opportunity for patients and primary care providers alike. Primary care provider reimbursement can improve the opportunity for the patient to receive appropriate care from their clinic without having to drive potentially hundreds of miles to see a specialist. For FQHCs and RHCs, providers that offer care to the most underserved populations in our state, keeping patients is critical to their funding structure. FQHCs are obligated to care for patients regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay, so they often see the most vulnerable patients who likely do not have the ability to travel to a specialist many miles away.

Medi-Cal beneficiaries continue to lack access to specialty care, as described in the DHCS 2017-18 Access Assessment. E-consult offers a foundational strategy to alleviate specialty access issues, in addition to improved provider work quality and satisfaction, and cost savings for the health system. Research out of the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services found that 25% of e-consults performed within the DHS clinic network were resolved without the need for a follow-up in-person visit over the period 2012 to 2015. Numerous other studies have demonstrated improved access and timeliness of care, high level of provider satisfaction, and improved efficiency. Recently, the California Health Care Foundation also released the results

of an evaluation showing that e-consult in a California-based FQHC network resulted in 17% decrease in average wait time for an in-person specialist visit and that 25% of e-consults were resolved without requiring an inpatient visit, among other findings. Even more, recent research from UCSF funded by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation shows that patients have similar satisfaction levels for e-consult compared to those for in-person visits, and prefer that their providers use e consult in the future. Research demonstrates that e-consult stands to improve access to care, provider, and patient satisfaction, while decreasing costs.

This bill will ensure coverage of e-consults under Medi-Cal for primary care providers, including those who operate at an FQHC or RHC, creating reimbursement equity between primary care providers and specialist providers when assisting patients through the use of e-consults. Additionally, and at a minimum, this bill will require that the reimbursement policy for primary care providers should be consistent with Medicare coverage policy.

Primary care provider reimbursement for e-consult will make this service more accessible to our safety net providers across the State, and will result in significant improvements in wait times for specialist visits.

For these reasons, the California State Association of Psychiatrists is pleased to support SB 365 (Caballero) and requests your signature on this measure.

Sincerely,



Paul J. Yoder
Legislative Advocate

CC: Senator Anna Caballero

References:

www.econsultworkgroup.com

LADHS - <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2016.1283>

CHCF - <https://www.chcf.org/publication/evaluation-provider-experiences-econsults/>

UCSF - <https://www.annfammed.org/content/18/1/35.full>