
SENATE BILL 5916

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2026 Regular Session

By Senators Harris, Chapman, and Saldaña

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1 AN ACT Relating to nonopioid drugs for the treatment of pain;
2 amending RCW 48.43.400; adding a new section to chapter 41.05 RCW;
3 adding a new section to chapter 48.43 RCW; adding a new section to
4 chapter 74.09 RCW; and adding a new section to chapter 43.70 RCW.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 41.05
7 RCW to read as follows:

8 (1) A health plan offered to employees and their covered
9 dependents under this chapter issued or renewed on or after January
10 1, 2027, may not maintain prescription drug practices that
11 disadvantage or discourage nonopioid drugs for the treatment or
12 management of pain with respect to coverage relative to any opioid or
13 narcotic drug for the treatment or management of pain, including:

14 (a) Designating a nonopioid drug as a nonpreferred drug if any
15 opioid or narcotic drug is designated as a preferred drug; or

16 (b) Establishing more restrictive or more extensive prescription
17 drug utilization management practices, including prior authorization
18 or step therapy requirements, for a nonopioid drug that are more
19 restrictive or more extensive than the least restrictive or extensive
20 prescription drug utilization management practice applicable to an
21 opioid or narcotic drug.

1 (2) For the purposes of this section:

2 (a) "Nonopioid drug" means a drug or biological product that is
3 indicated to produce analgesia without acting on the body's opioid
4 receptors and that has been approved by the United States food and
5 drug administration.

6 (b) "Prescription drug utilization management" has the same
7 meaning as in RCW 48.43.400.

8 (c) "Prior authorization" has the same meaning as in RCW
9 48.43.400.

10 (d) "Step therapy protocol" has the same meaning as in RCW
11 48.43.400.

12 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 48.43
13 RCW to read as follows:

14 (1) A health plan issued or renewed on or after January 1, 2027,
15 may not maintain prescription drug practices that disadvantage or
16 discourage nonopioid drugs for the treatment or management of pain
17 with respect to coverage relative to any opioid or narcotic drug for
18 the treatment or management of pain, including:

19 (a) Designating a nonopioid drug as a nonpreferred drug if any
20 opioid or narcotic drug is designated as a preferred drug; or

21 (b) Establishing more restrictive or more extensive prescription
22 drug utilization management practices, including prior authorization
23 or step therapy requirements, for a nonopioid drug that are more
24 restrictive or more extensive than the least restrictive or extensive
25 prescription drug utilization management practice applicable to an
26 opioid or narcotic drug.

27 (2) For the purposes of this section, "nonopioid drug" means a
28 drug or biological product that is indicated to produce analgesia
29 without acting on the body's opioid receptors and that has been
30 approved by the United States food and drug administration.

31 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 74.09
32 RCW to read as follows:

33 (1) Beginning January 1, 2027, a managed care organization may
34 not maintain prescription drug practices that disadvantage or
35 discourage nonopioid drugs for the treatment or management of pain
36 with respect to coverage relative to any opioid or narcotic drug for
37 the treatment or management of pain, including:

1 (a) Designating a nonopioid drug as a nonpreferred drug if any
2 opioid or narcotic drug is designated as a preferred drug; or

3 (b) Establishing more restrictive or more extensive prescription
4 drug utilization management practices, including prior authorization
5 or step therapy protocol requirements, for a nonopioid drug that are
6 more restrictive or more extensive than the least restrictive or
7 extensive prescription drug utilization management practice
8 applicable to an opioid or narcotic drug.

9 (2) The authority shall assure that any prescription drug
10 practices that it applies to fee-for-service programs and managed
11 care organizations under this chapter comply with the requirements of
12 subsection (1) of this section.

13 (3) For the purposes of this section:

14 (a) "Nonopioid drug" means a drug or biological product that is
15 indicated to produce analgesia without acting on the body's opioid
16 receptors and that has been approved by the United States food and
17 drug administration.

18 (b) "Prescription drug utilization management" has the same
19 meaning as in RCW 48.43.400.

20 (c) "Prior authorization" has the same meaning as in RCW
21 48.43.400.

22 (d) "Step therapy protocol" has the same meaning as in RCW
23 48.43.400.

24 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 43.70
25 RCW to read as follows:

26 By January 1, 2027, the department shall develop and publish on
27 its website an educational pamphlet regarding the use of nonopioid
28 alternatives for the treatment of pain. At a minimum, the pamphlet
29 must include:

30 (1) Information on available nonopioid alternatives for the
31 treatment of pain, including nonopioid medicinal drugs or drug
32 products and nonpharmacological therapies; and

33 (2) The advantages and disadvantages of the use of nonopioid
34 alternatives.

35 **Sec. 5.** RCW 48.43.400 and 2019 c 171 s 1 are each amended to
36 read as follows:

1 The definitions in this section apply throughout this section and
2 RCW 48.43.410 (~~and~~), 48.43.420, and section 2 of this act unless
3 the context clearly requires otherwise.

4 (1) "Clinical practice guidelines" means a systemically developed
5 statement to assist decision making by health care providers and
6 patients about appropriate health care for specific clinical
7 circumstances and conditions.

8 (2) "Clinical review criteria" means the written screening
9 procedures, decision rules, medical protocols, and clinical practice
10 guidelines used by a health carrier or prescription drug utilization
11 management entity as an element in the evaluation of medical
12 necessity and appropriateness of requested prescription drugs under a
13 health plan.

14 (3) "Emergency fill" means a limited dispensed amount of
15 medication that allows time for the processing of prescription drug
16 utilization management.

17 (4) "Medically appropriate" means prescription drugs that under
18 the applicable standard of care are appropriate: (a) To improve or
19 preserve health, life, or function; (b) to slow the deterioration of
20 health, life, or function; or (c) for the early screening,
21 prevention, evaluation, diagnosis, or treatment of a disease,
22 condition, illness, or injury.

23 (5) "Prescription drug utilization management" means a set of
24 formal techniques used by a health carrier or prescription drug
25 utilization management entity, that are designed to monitor the use
26 of or evaluate the medical necessity, appropriateness, efficacy, or
27 efficiency of prescription drugs including, but not limited to, prior
28 authorization and step therapy protocols.

29 (6) "Prescription drug utilization management entity" means an
30 entity affiliated with, under contract with, or acting on behalf of a
31 health carrier to perform prescription drug utilization management.

32 (7) "Prior authorization" means a mandatory process that a
33 carrier or prescription drug utilization management entity requires a
34 provider or facility to follow to determine if a service is a benefit
35 and meets the requirements for medical necessity, clinical
36 appropriateness, level of care, or effectiveness in relation to the
37 applicable plan.

1 (8) "Step therapy protocol" means a protocol or program that
2 establishes the specific sequence in which prescription drugs for a
3 specified medical condition will be covered by a health carrier.

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