

SB 945 – Repeal of Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Caps

IN BRIEF

SB 945 ensures that low-income women in California who suffer from breast or cervical cancer and are uninsured or underinsured receive the treatment they need for their cancer by repealing the arbitrary treatment caps of the Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Program.

BACKGROUND

Existing law requires the State Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) to perform various health functions, including providing breast and cervical cancer screening and treatment for low-income uninsured and underinsured individuals.

Existing law prohibits “period of coverage” for the state cancer treatment of people diagnosed with either breast or cervical cancer from exceeding 18 or 24 months, respectively.

THE ISSUE

It is estimated that approximately one in every eight women will have breast cancer during their lifetime. The Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Program (BCCTP), operated by DHCS and provided through Medicaid, seeks to combat this problem by providing needed cancer treatment to low-income uninsured or underinsured individuals diagnosed with breast and/or cervical cancer.

Currently, the state-funded BCCTP’s period of coverage is limited to 18 months for breast cancer and 24 months for cervical cancer. Under the federal Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Treatment Act of 2000, states are authorized to provide women diagnosed with cancer comprehensive health care coverage through Medicaid until the end of their treatment. The federal government does not impose time limits on BCCTP regarding the length of time a state will receive federal reimbursement to cover the cost of care for eligible women.

Further, the Affordable Care Act prohibits health plans from imposing time limits on benefits for those with health coverage. This means that many California women that are serviced by the state BCCTP receive less protection in their cancer coverage than what is provided by private insurers and allowed by the federal government, due to the 18 and 24 month treatment caps.

Low-income and ethnic minorities experience the largest cancer burden disparities due to the obstacles they face in receiving health care services related to cancer prevention, early detection, and high-quality treatment. This is evidenced by the growing gap between breast cancer mortality rates in Black women and White women, which has risen from 30.3% to 41.8% in the last 10 years.

The arbitrary 18 and 24 month caps on breast and cervical cancer treatment that the state BCCTP enforces disproportionately impacts the California women that are most in need. It is time that this policy is changed to reflect the more compassionate and cost-effective federal policy of treating women’s cancer for as long as they need.

THE SOLUTION

SB 945 will ensure the Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Program works at its full potential and promotes overall health outcomes of California women by repealing its arbitrary 18 and 24 month caps on breast and cervical cancer treatment.

In doing so, SB 945 will help ensure that low-income women in California who are uninsured or underinsured receive the treatment they need for their breast and cervical cancer, without having to fear that their treatment will be cut short.

SUPPORT

Susan G. Komen (sponsor)

OPPOSITION

None

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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