



*This notification is being published at the request of the Maryland Department of Health.*

## **Opioid Policy Changes**

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and the eight Medicaid Managed Care Organizations (MCOs), including UnitedHealthcare, in the Maryland's HealthChoice Program are notifying providers of several policy changes which may affect their practices. These policy changes are made in light of the increasing volume of opioid-related deaths occurring in Maryland and amongst Maryland Medicaid beneficiaries.

### **Background**

In calendar year 2015, drug-and alcohol-related intoxication deaths in the State increased for the fifth year in a row, reaching an all-time high of 1,259 deaths, 86 percent of which were opioid-related<sup>1</sup>. This epidemic has disproportionately affected Maryland Medicaid beneficiaries as 55 percent of all drug-and alcohol-related intoxication deaths in 2015 occurred amongst individuals who were enrolled in the Medicaid program at some point during the same calendar year.

Due to the rise of opioid addiction and opioid-related overdose deaths in the State, MDH and its eight Medicaid MCOs – including UnitedHealthcare Community Plan and University of Maryland Health Partners – have collaborated on several policy changes and recommendations to promote changes in prescribing practices based on recent guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Opioid Prescribing for Chronic Pain<sup>2</sup>.

### **Notification**

Medicaid participants that are receiving long-acting opioids, fentanyl, methadone for pain, or prescriptions above 90 Morphine Milligram Equivalent (MME) daily will be notified of these changes by June 2017. The attached policies related to opiate prescribing are being implemented no later than July 1, 2017 for all Medicaid patients, including those served by UnitedHealthcare Community Plan or Medicaid Fee-For-Service.

### **Recommendation**

In the coming months, the Maryland Department of Health will be offering further training on the new opioid prescribing policies outlined in this letter. We urge you to evaluate patients impacted by these policy changes and, where appropriate, step them down to lower doses or utilize non-opioid first-line treatments.

Thank you for your engagement on this important topic.

<sup>1</sup> Opioid-related deaths include deaths related to heroin, prescription opioids, and non-pharmaceutical fentanyl.

<sup>2</sup> The full 2016 CDC guidance on pain management can be found at:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/guideline.html>.