New Medicaid Policy Will Help States Better Fight the Opioid Crisis

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Here's some good news for harm reduction advocates: The U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has announced a new policy that will allow states to design demonstration projects that increase access to opioid and other substance use disorders, Insurance News Net reports.

The new policy is a direct response to President Trump's recent declaration that the U.S. opioid crisis and hepatitis C virus (HCV) syndemic constitutes a "national emergency." In essence, CMS's announcement will afford states greater flexibility to provide a fuller continuum of care to treat substance use disorders and open up funding for critical residential treatment facilities for which Medicaid was previously unable to pay without a waiver.

In addition, CMS is announcing the immediate approval of both New Jersey's and Utah's current demonstration waivers. In New Jersey, the new demonstration policy will allow the state to test a comprehensive and coordinated substance use treatment approach for both adults and children, which will include residential treatment, withdrawal management, medication-assisted treatment, peer support and targeted case management.

Previously, states were required to completely build out their systems for treatment delivery while complying with strict CMS criteria before getting approvals.

In Utah, the change will allow for state health officials to create a broader health care delivery system for people who are chronically homeless or within the justice system who are also at high risk for addiction.

The announcement also dramatically enhances CMS's ability to evaluate how these demonstration programs are working through an integrated data collection system. This data can then be used to inform CMS on best practices and methods to combat the opioid epidemic and increase the agency's capacity to learn about which substance use treatment delivery models are most effective.

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