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**Pennsylvania’s Medicaid Program Announces Policy Changes
that Remove Restrictions to Hepatitis C Medications**

May 17, 2017 – Yesterday, following negotiations with the Pennsylvania Health Law Project (PHLP) and co-counsel, the Department of Human Services (DHS) announced it will change Pennsylvania’s Medicaid (MA) policy to expand coverage of life-saving drugs to treat the Hepatitis C (HCV) virus. On July 1, 2017, DHS will begin phasing in coverage to treat individuals with HCV as early as possible in the course of their disease.

The change increasing access to relatively new HCV treatment drugs follows the clinical recommendations presented one year ago by DHS’ Pharmacy & Therapeutics Committee. It was supported by every practitioner on the committee and opposed by every member on the payer side because of their cost. Pennsylvania had been limiting their use to those whose disease had shown up on tests measuring liver damage, and added other restrictions — barriers that exist for no other disease.

PHLP- along with attorneys from the Center for Health Law & Policy Innovation of Harvard Law School, Community Legal Services, and Kairys, Rudovsky, Messing & Feinberg- notified DHS in 2016 of their intent to file litigation unless the Medicaid program removed requiring a person to prove liver damage from its guidelines for authorizing HCV medications.

HCV can grow undetected for decades before causing chronic and sometimes life-threatening liver problems. An [estimated](#) 3 million Americans are living with chronic Hepatitis C, about half of them undiagnosed. At least 20,000 people in the United States die each year due to liver disease caused by HCV, making it the deadliest communicable disease in the country.

“Pennsylvania’s new approach will directly improve the lives of many of our clients – some of Pennsylvania’s most vulnerable citizens,” said Laval Miller Wilson, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Health Law Project (PHLP).

HCV test scores are categorized by the severity of liver scarring (“Fibrosis”) on a scale of F0 through F4, with F0 being the least severe form of the disease and F4 being the most severe. Under the new policy, Pennsylvania Medicaid will authorize the drugs for beneficiaries with liver damage test scores of F1 or higher starting on July 1, 2017 and

will authorize treatment for beneficiaries with scores of F0 or higher starting on January 1, 2018.

“Today’s announcement means that thousands of vulnerable Pennsylvanians will soon have easier access to pharmaceuticals that can cure HCV,” said DHS Secretary Ted Dallas. “Moving forward, the severity of this disease can no longer prevent all MA beneficiaries from getting access to treatment if they need it.”

James Luongo, a Medicaid beneficiary who resides in Philadelphia and suffers from Hepatitis C, says, "I'm very relieved that I will finally be able to get the medication I need to treat my disease. I am also happy that now everyone who is infected will be able to access treatment. This new policy is very an important step to preventing further harm to people already infected and to preventing future spread of this disease."

More information can be found [here](#).

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