

Mental Health Parity Act

The Mental Health Parity Act (the “Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008”) was signed into law on October 3, 2008, and the Federal Mental Health Parity (MHP) law becomes effective October 3, 2009.

The MHP law applies to group health insurers and to fully insured and self-insured ERISA groups of 51 or more employees that include mental health/substance use disorder benefits. It mandates equalization of copays, coinsurance, deductibles and the elimination of day and visit limits and financial maximums. This can be accomplished by applying the same limits as apply to the medical and surgical benefits, or by creating “separate but equal” limits. The Act does not require health plans to provide mental health/substance use disorder benefits; however, if these benefits are offered, they must be at parity with the group’s medical and surgical benefits.

Self-funded government (non-federal) groups, such as school districts, city or county government are exempt from the law. The law does not affect Individual, Small Group (2-50), and Conversion/Portability plans.

The effective date for new groups will be October 16, 2009. The benefit will be enhanced for our existing groups at their renewals beginning November 1, 2009. Prior to renewal, a group may be contacted to verify the number of full- and part-time employees.

Care Management

Utilization Management activities are still allowed by the new law and are effective in managing the quality and cost of Mental Health and Chemical Dependency care.