



# Colorado Society of Addiction Medicine

*A Chapter of American Society of Addiction Medicine*

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June 23, 2020

Governor Jared Polis  
State Capitol Building  
200 E. Colfax Ave., Rm. 136  
Denver, CO 80203

Re: Adoption of Nationally Recognized Guidelines for the Treatment of Addiction

Dear Governor Polis,

On behalf of the Colorado Society of Addiction Medicine (COSAM), the medical specialty society representing physicians and clinicians in Colorado who specialize in the prevention and treatment of addiction, we would like to take this opportunity to urge you to require insurance carriers to provide coverage for substance use disorder (SUD) in alignment with nationally recognized guidelines for the treatment of addiction. With the national addiction crisis significantly affecting Colorado, it is vital that Coloradans have access to evidence-based, patient-focused care.

COSAM is dedicated to increasing access to and improving the quality of addiction treatment for patients in Colorado. To that end, we are committed to advocating for a state addiction treatment system that ensures patients with mental health and substance use disorders (SUD) receive treatment at the right level of care. Addressing systemic barriers that individuals experience in accessing treatment can help Colorado decrease costs and improve patient outcome.

SB20-007 would require that insurers provide coverage for the treatment of SUD in accordance with the ASAM Criteria or other nationally recognized guidelines for placement, medical necessity, and utilization management determinations. The ASAM Criteria is the most widely used and comprehensive set of evidence-based guidelines for placement, continued stay, and transfer or discharge of patients with addiction and co-occurring conditions. Several controlled studies have found that treatment based on the ASAM Criteria is associated with less morbidity, better client functioning, and more efficient service utilization than mismatched treatment.<sup>i</sup> These results support the predictive validity and cost-effectiveness of the use of the ASAM Criteria. They also indicate that the ASAM Criteria have valid clinical decision-making guidelines, good feasibility and reliability through standardized computer assessment instruments, and good concurrent validity in treating patients throughout the multidimensional assessments.

COSAM shares your goal of improving access to evidence-based addiction treatment in Colorado. All Coloradans should be able to receive the appropriate level of care, tailored to ensure they obtain the best health outcome possible. Unfortunately, when insurers create their own criteria, they can fail to cover appropriate treatment, as in the *Wit v. United Behavioral Health* case.<sup>ii</sup> Therefore, we urge you to require that insurers utilize the ASAM Criteria or other

nationally recognized guidelines while providing coverage for addiction treatment. Please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Joshua Blum at [Joshua.Blum@dhha.org](mailto:Joshua.Blum@dhha.org), if COSAM can be of any service to you. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joshua Blum". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joshua Blum, MD, FASAM  
President, the Colorado Society of Addiction Medicine

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<sup>i</sup> McLellan AT, Alterman AI, Metzger DS, et al. Similarity of outcome predictors across opiate, cocaine, and alcohol treatments: role of treatment services. *J Consult Clin Psychol.* 1994;62(6):1141-1158. doi:10.1037//0022-006x.62.6.1141; Gastfriend DR, McLellan AT. Treatment matching. Theoretic basis and practical implications. *Med Clin North Am.* 1997;81(4):945-966. doi:10.1016/s0025-7125(05)70557-5; Hayashida M, Alterman AI, McLellan AT, et al. Comparative effectiveness and costs of inpatient and outpatient detoxification of patients with mild-to-moderate alcohol withdrawal syndrome. *N Engl J Med.* 1989;320(6):358-365. doi:10.1056/NEJM198902093200605

<sup>ii</sup> Kennedy, P., Ramstad, J. (2019) Landmark ruling sets precedent for parity coverage of mental health and addiction treatment. *STAT News.* Available at: <https://www.statnews.com/2019/03/18/landmark-ruling-mental-health-addiction-treatment/#:~:text=A%20federal%20court%20recently%20ruled,the%20case%20of%20Wit%20v.&text=United%20Behavioral%20Health%2C%2011%20plaintiffs,on%20the%20flawed%20review%20criteria.>