



Healthcare Policy Roundup

June 5, 2018

Catch the Highlights!

- *New report highlights enforcement of mental health parity laws*
- *City officials propose third gender option for NYC birth certificates*
- *Report identifies disparities in food pricing throughout NYC*

Questions? Comments?

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New Yorkers receive \$3M in mental health parity claims:

According to a recent [report](#) from New York State Attorney General Barbara Underwood, New Yorkers have received over \$2 million in restitution for denied mental health claims in the past five years. Combined with eight national settlements across seven major health plans, insurers have paid out nearly \$3 million to the state.

Per state and federal law, health insurers are required to cover mental health and substance use disorder treatment as they would any other medical condition. However, many patients continue to experience roadblocks in care, with some insurers imposing stricter utilization reviews and higher copays for behavioral health services.

In 2013, the Attorney General's office launched an industrywide investigation in response to a growing number of complaints. Since that time, health plans have reimbursed over 300 New York consumers and have removed prior authorization requirements for medication-assisted treatment (MAT) of substance use disorders. Between 2014 and 2018, the number of parity-related complaints to the Health Care Bureau Helpline also decreased by 60%.

City officials propose third gender option for NYC birth certificates:

This Thursday, City Council Speaker Corey Johnson is expected to unveil a new bill proposing a third gender option for New York City birth certificates. Under this proposal, adults would have the opportunity to identify as gender "X" on their birth certificates. Currently, parents are able to designate a newborn's sex as "undetermined" or "unknown".



Should the proposal pass, New York City would join California, Oregon, and Washington state in having a third birth certificate category. The legislation would also allow transgender and gender non-conforming (TG/GNC) individuals to fill out their own affidavit before applying for a birth certificate change. Currently, TG/GNC individuals require affirmation from a medical or mental health provider before applying for a new designation.

The bill has been widely supported by city-level officials, including Health Commissioner Mary Bassett and Mayor Bill de Blasio. In a recent statement, Commissioner Bassett noted: "We know that being able to live your authentic gender and gender expression is critical to physical and mental health. Now more than ever, we must ensure that all people can live their best and healthiest lives."

New report identifies disparities in neighborhood grocery prices:

A new [report](#) from the Hunter College Food Policy Center shows significant disparities in healthy food prices across New York City neighborhoods. Researchers surveyed 35 supermarkets, six farmer's markets, and two online markets (Amazon and FreshDirect) to compare prices of foods typically purchased by households that utilize food stamps.

According to the report, the average cost of food items varied widely by neighborhood, borough, and socioeconomic population. In Brooklyn, for example, meat and eggs were more expensive in neighborhoods with higher income status, while dairy, fruit, and vegetables were more expensive in neighborhoods with lower income status.

Although results do not indicate consistent pricing differentials across all boroughs, observed differences in Brooklyn highlight the importance of addressing food equity and access in underserved communities. According to the Hunter College Food Policy Center, more than 1.3 million New York residents are food insecure, many of whom also live with a chronic diet-related disease.



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