



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
**HEALTH CARE AUTHORITY**

626 8th Avenue, SE • P.O. Box 45502 •  
Olympia, Washington 98504-5502



P.O. Box 4004  
Bothell, Washington 98041-4004

September 30, 2019

Dear Prescriber,

**Revised letter. This letter supersedes the previous letter regarding the new limits on opioid prescriptions.**

On November 1, 2019, the Health Care Authority (HCA) will update the clinical policy pertaining to opioid prescriptions for Apple Health (Medicaid). Both the Apple Health contracted managed care organizations and the fee-for-service program will be impacted by the policy change.

We're writing to make you aware of the policy change and let you know that we will be posting online resources early September on the HCA website.

**Updated policy helps combat opioid crisis**

As you are aware, opioid use disorder (misuse and addiction) is a public health crisis in Washington State and across the country. On October 24, 2018, President Trump signed the Substance Use-Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment ("SUPPORT") for Patients and Communities Act. The SUPPORT Act includes several provisions directed to the Medicaid program that requires updates to the current opioid policy.

HCA's opioid policy is a prevention and patient safety tool. The policy will now include a maximum daily dose limit of 120 morphine milligram equivalents (120 MME). In order to exceed the daily dose of 120 MME an attestation documenting that a second opinion from a pain specialist was obtained, or why one is not needed, is required. HCA's limits on acute prescriptions and on the transition from acute to chronic use remain; these are critical to reducing long-term opioid use and the risk of developing opioid use disorder.

**Medical organizations support**

HCA coordinated with the Washington State Medical Association, Washington State Hospital Association, health plan partners, and others in developing the policy, which aligns with recommendations from the [Centers for Disease Control](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/guideline.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/guideline.html>), the [Washington State Agency Medical Directors Group](http://agencymeddirectors.wa.gov/guidelines.asp) (<http://agencymeddirectors.wa.gov/guidelines.asp>), and the [Bree Collaborative](http://www.breecollaborative.org/topic-areas/opioid/) (<http://www.breecollaborative.org/topic-areas/opioid/>) around safe and appropriate opioid prescribing.

**Summary of policy requirements**

The policy limits the quantity of opioids that can be prescribed to opiate naïve patients for non-cancer pain. The limits for new opioid prescriptions will be:

- No more than 18 doses (approximately a 3-day supply) for patients age 20 or younger.

- No more than 42 doses (approximately a 7-day supply) for patients age 21 or older.

The pharmacy can override the day supply limits using an expedited authorization code when:

- You indicate “Exempt” in the text of the prescription.
- The patient is undergoing active cancer treatment, hospice, palliative care or end-of-life care.

At the point of transition from acute to chronic opioid treatment, defined as six weeks of therapy, a prior authorization is required.

For both acute and chronic prescribing, doses are limited to 120 MME per day. Daily doses greater than 120 MME per day require an attestation form be completed, signed, and sent to Molina Healthcare of Washington.

Patients who are already on daily doses greater than 200MME will be grandfathered for one year and will not be subject to these limits or to prior authorization unless their dose increases from the current regimen.

You can read the full policy on the HCA website.

### **Online resources available soon**

Informational materials about the policy will be available soon, including an online Q&A for prescribers, pharmacists, pharmacy billers, and clients. An updated expedited authorization list, and instructions to request prior authorization.

These materials will be available on the HCA website early September.

### **Important step**

The opioid clinical policy is an important step in helping children and adults in Washington avoid opioid use disorder and supporting safe and effective use of opioids. I appreciate your engagement with this effort to lower the effects of the opioid crisis in our state.

Sincerely,

Molina Healthcare of Washington  
Pharmacy Department