

MENTAL HEALTH

The Six Protected Classes Policy ensures that all or substantially all medications to treat these serious conditions are covered by Part D plans. Congress created this policy to protect Medicare beneficiaries with some of the most serious health conditions — **mental health challenges, cancer, HIV, epilepsy, and those at risk of organ rejection**. Congress has repeatedly reaffirmed bipartisan support for the six protected classes.

Mental health challenges significantly impact the Medicare population. Eliminating robust Part D coverage for this population will leave some of the most vulnerable Medicare beneficiaries, who may already have difficulty managing their disease, without adequate protections to ensure timely access to these therapies. Availability of medications plays a major role in maintaining mental health. According to Avalere, in 2019, generics represented 98 percent of antidepressant prescriptions filled and 91 percent of antipsychotics filled. People living with mental illness require carefully managed medication regimens. These medication regimens require strict adherence and are very rarely interchangeable. In fact, the consequences for those living with mental illness of losing access to their medications are severe and can include suicidal ideations, emergency room visits, hospitalization, and loss of function.

Why does this matter?

There are nine symptoms of major depressive disorder (MDD) in the DSM-V. To be diagnosed with MDD, a patient needs to present with a combination of five of these symptoms. This means that there are over 200 different

combinations of symptoms that a patient with MDD could have, with each combination requiring a unique set of medications to treat that patient's personal condition. **Having only one or two drugs to treat the wide-ranging ways someone could present with depression is simply inadequate, especially among an older population where depression is a significant predictor of suicide.** Those with other mental health conditions, like schizophrenia, also need to have access to a wide range of medications.

Mechanisms to contain costs and steer patients toward lower-cost options are already in place and are working very effectively. Part D Plans are allowed to tier the cost of medications, which has proven effective. **The six protected classes policy ensures that patients who have unique medical needs and who require carefully controlled medication regimens – such as those with mental illnesses – can continue to access the full range of prescribed therapies.**

21% of U.S. adults experienced mental illness in 2020 (52.9 million people). This represents 1 in 5 adults.*



*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021). *Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health* (HHS Publication No. PEP21-07-01-003, NSDUH Series H-56). Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

