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New MAHP Policy Brief Examines Barriers & Measures to Improve Opioid Addiction Treatment
Recommendations Include Improving Care Coordination, Greater Data Collection & Public Education to Address Obstacles to Care

Boston, MA – The Massachusetts Association of Health Plans (MAHP), representing the state's nation-leading health plans, today issued a detailed policy brief drawing attention to key challenges to treating the growing opioid abuse crisis, recommending measures to increase access, better integrate patient care, collect better data on services, and further reduce the stigma around addiction. The brief follows recent initiatives that Governor Charlie Baker and Attorney General Maura Healey have announced to combat opioid addiction.

"Barriers clearly exist to effective treatment, including issues related to access, the ability to integrate patient care across a continuum of providers, an understanding of addiction services, and best practices of care," said Lora Pellegrini, MAHP President & CEO. "Addressing the current crisis requires a multi-pronged approach to ensure that providers are practicing evidence-based standards, that data is available to measure whether those standards are being followed, as well as refine best practices and inform the community about treatments that are proving the best outcomes for patients, and that patients and families understand their options."

The policy brief outlines a series of recommendations to improve patient outcomes. Among the recommendations:

- **Improve Treatment Standards, Care Coordination, and Integration.** Efforts should include adopting state-based accreditation standards for treatment facilities licensed by the state's Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (BSAS) to ensure a full range of services are offered, treatment plans are developed for patients transitioning from one level of treatment to another, behavioral health and substance abuse treatment is integrated with primary care, and that nationally recognized, evidence-based standards in treating patients with opioid addiction are being followed.
- **Strengthen Data Collection to Promote Best Practices.** Building off of Governor Baker's call for improved transparency, BSAS-licensed treatment facilities should be required to collect and report comprehensive quality assessment data, including treatment type, level of care, and outcomes to measure the system's success and assist in promoting best practices in treating opioid addiction.
- **Enhance Education and Support Efforts.** Training and supports for physicians in screening and treatment for opioid addiction, including primary care clinicians, should be grounded in best practices to ensure that treatment is based on up-to-date clinical guidelines and efforts should be undertaken to increase understanding of opioid addiction treatment options to reduce stigma.

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In discussing steps that health plans have undertaken to help address the opioid crisis, Pellegrini noted MAHP member health plans are consistently rated the country's best for clinical quality, providing coverage for a broad range of services to treat opioid addiction including inpatient and outpatient treatments and that its members recently had individually announced through the Association that they would begin making coverage of Methadone available by July 1. "Our members are committed to ensuring that all residents of the Commonwealth who need opioid addiction treatment have access to the full spectrum of services and that treatment for substance abuse and chemical dependency is integrated with medical, behavioral health and pharmacy services to meet the specific needs of each patient."

The recommendations are based on research of areas contributing to barriers to opioid treatment which include:

- Access issues with state data reporting gaps in substance abuse services across the Commonwealth.
- Program design and care coordination issues including a lack of coordinated care networks that allow for patients, particularly those with co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders, to receive services across the continuum of care.
- Lack of available providers as research by the New England Comparative Effectiveness Public Advisory Council has identified that current provider capacity in New England is insufficient to meet patient need.
- Perception of opioid addiction and treatment including a lack of understanding about the disease, impinging the ability of individuals and families to make informed decisions about treatment options.

As part of its effort to promote a dialogue on interventions that are evidence based and have been shown to be effective for the treatment of opioid addiction, MAHP will be hosting a half-day forum on March 9 at Suffolk University Law School, located at 120 Tremont Street in Boston from 7:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. The forum, *Opioid Addiction Treatment: Bridging the Gap between Evidence Based Medicine, Policy, and Practice*, will feature leading national opioid addiction experts to discuss evidence based treatment options including existing clinical guidelines, levels of care, and barriers to accessing appropriate care, as well as recommendations for effective addiction treatment and an improved treatment landscape. Confirmed speakers include:

- **Hon. Jennifer Flanagan**, (D-Leominster), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse
- **Dan Ollendorf, PhD**, Chief Review Officer of Institute for Clinical and Economic Review
- **Stuart Gitlow, MD, MPH, MBA, FAPA**, President of the American Society of Addiction Medicine
- **Rhonda J. Robinson Beale, MD**, Co-chair of a National Quality Forum Steering Committee working on "Evidence-Based Practices to Treat Substance Use Conditions"
- **Amanda Wilson, MD**, President and CEO of CleanSlate Centers
- **Domenic A. Ciraulo MD**, Chief Medical Advisor, Gosnold on Cape Cod, representing the Massachusetts Association of Behavioral Health Systems
- **Martha Bebinger**, Reporter, WBUR

A link to the full agenda is available on MAHP's website at www.mahp.com or by clicking [MAHP March 9 Forum](#).

About MAHP

The Massachusetts Association of Health Plans represents 17 health plans covering more than 2.6 million Massachusetts residents. It is dedicated to improving health for all in Massachusetts by promoting affordable, safe and coordinated health care.